

INTERVIEW OF PHIL SOWA, 1994

BLAKE HAILEY: Today's date is April 22nd, 1994. I'm Blake Hailey and we're pleased to have with us Mr. Phillip Sowa, the CEO of the Osteopathic Medical Center of Texas. We're making this video at the University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth and Biomedical Communications Department in the Gibson D. Lewis Health Science Library. Mr. Sowa, thanks for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with us this morning.

PHIL SOWA: Well thank you, Blake for inviting me.

BLAKE HAILEY: I'd like to start, if we could, back to your background, long before you came to OMCT and some of the things you were involved in.

PHIL SOWA: Well I've been in academic health administration now for probably going on 13 or 14 years. Prior to the four years I've been here at osteopathic medical center, the five most recent years I was the Chief Executive Officer for San Francisco General Hospital and I was on the faculty of the University of California San Francisco and prior to that for four years I spent four years as the president and chief executive officer of the Regional Medical Center at Memphis which was the major teaching facility at the University of Tennessee. So I guess my background is really grounded in Academic Health Administration, and I've really enjoyed that portion of my professional life.

BLAKE HAILEY: How did you get interested in osteopathy and decide to come here to -- to Fort Worth?

PHIL SOWA: Well, first of all, when you say how did I get interested in osteopathy, I'm a professional health executive and the reason we actually moved to Fort Worth was my family's in the northeast part of this country. My wife is from Georgia. We had been out --

BLAKE HAILEY: You're from Rhode Island, right?

PHIL SOWA: That's correct. We had been out in California five years and really it was somewhat of a stress, although California's wonderful, beautiful and the relationship at the school is great. We really wanted to make a move to come closer to home. I was contacted by this institution through their executive search and started looking at the size of the institution, the community which it served, the relationship that it had with the then Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine and now the University of North Texas, and felt that -- that from a career prospective I needed to get into a community institution, but I still wanted to maintain my academic ties. And so it was really kind of a perfect fit, then came osteopathic medicine. Osteopathic medicine, in my mind, has been actually an additive dimension to the relationship not having a great knowledge about it prior to coming here.

BLAKE HAILEY: And back in December y'all signed an agreement, too. I know that you've helped the relationship along with the Health Science Center and the hospital. What are the terms of the new affiliation agreement and all? How is that going to benefit to your hospital and the school?

PHIL SOWA: Well, I think the relationship that had existed for the some-20 years, or however long the school has been in existence, and the hospital has really been a relationship that had been built on trust and consideration and I think that as we move forward and as relationships typically become more complex it's always important to memorialize these types of relationships, to really document the responsibilities, qualitatively and quantitatively that each institution will bring to the table.

BLAKE HAILEY: Uh-huh.

PHIL SOWA: And I think this relationship and this document that we're able to successfully draft and get approved is really going to be the foundation to a relationship that will exist through the 21st Century and not just on an annual basis.

BLAKE HAILEY: So things are looking pretty good then between the two institutions.

PHIL SOWA: Well, from an operational prospective, I'm really excited. I think the quality of medical programs and educational programs that we have at our institution are our first rate. We've been able to build the quality of service at our institution to include joint commission and accreditation approval as well as our current AOA status. So I think a lot of very positive thing are happening.

BLAKE HAILEY: A lot of our focus here lately has been on the Health Science Center into that transformation. I'm curious to get your thoughts on why Health Science Center is necessary for the growth and success of TCOM and maybe some impacts as far as a hospital goes. Do you think you'll see benefits?

PHIL SOWA: Well, without question. I think, first of all, you've got a core of academic activities sitting here that we're basically being concentrated in -- in one direction and that being in medical education. And I think that -- that health care, the health sciences is going to far broaden that prospective for us to be able to develop physicians' assistance, for us to be able to educate professional public health administrators. I think these are all consistent with what I see as the building of this new delivery process in our country. From my prospective, at the hospital, we certainly enjoy our academic relationship. We enjoy being -- excuse the cliché -- the schoolhouse in some respect for the clinical physicians. And this can extend to other allied health professions as well. I think it's a great partnership and -- and we're really pleased to be part of it.

BLAKE HAILEY: Now you have an extensive background in the academic part of health medical schools and so forth. Do you see some chances on your thoughts as far as North Texas and Denton and the Health Science Center go?

PHIL SOWA: Well, without question. Again, first of all the Health Science Center, from it's clinical base has an extraordinary strength in geriatric medicine.

BLAKE HAILEY: Uh-huh.

PHIL SOWA: We found in our searching those relationships that the University of North Texas has an institute on aging. We at our institution across the street at the hospital have a significant population of elderly patients that we serve. Naturally, these three factor forces coming together allow us now to concentrate on developing a geriatric center of excellence. Perfect example of marrying the different disciplines into one single focus.

BLAKE HAILEY: Are there some other marriages, so to speak, that could be explored between North Texas and here at a later time?

PHIL SOWA: Of course. If you look, for example, at psychological training. I understand there's a PhD program in Clinical Psychology. Other academic programs that have relevance in our institution. And let me say this, you can step beyond just the health-driven academic programs. As a health care institution

we're kind of a microcosm in a way of industry. We have not only the clinical side of the equation, but we have the professional administrative/accounting and business side of the equation. So there are many relationships that could evolve within that family relationship, lodger relationship.

BLAKE HAILEY: Very interesting. How did you see -- or where do you see this Health Science Center have to offer that the others in Texas do not have? What are the strengths?

PHIL SOWA: First of all, we're talking about what this health science center really will offer. I think that the planning process of which I've been fortunate to be part of allows us to be -- I think this is a program that will be based and practicum. In other words, there will be hands-on practical application of the academic pursuits, versus the more traditional -- I don't want to say research-driven -- but research-driven academic pursuits. I think that's critical. I think that the practitioners that we train have to be out in the environment. I think whether you're training health professionals, public health professionals, or primary care physicians, those are the folks that are going to be out there laying on the hands. Those are the folks that are going to be out there applying their skill or their profession. That's different than a lot of academic health centers.

BLAKE HAILEY: I'm curious, also. You mentioned public health earlier and some other professional schools so obviously you have some thoughts on programs you'd like to see added. Could you explore those a little bit more?

PHIL SOWA: Rather than programs being added to ensure that the programs that are being developed have the -- the core requirements to -- to respond to community needs. Case in point, public health being able to -- to direct our preventive programs, have to be, again, based in reality so that my input to that will be to insure that there are proper financial information systems programs or curriculum that helps support that professional. I don't believe in do we idealist, although I think we all have them. Excuse me, I shouldn't say I don't believe in them. I think that we have to develop a practical approach to dealing with public health and not the ideal approach.

BLAKE HAILEY: What challenges lie ahead for you as CEO of the -- of the OMCT and the Health Science Center and the hospital?

PHIL SOWA: Well, obviously, the first challenge is survival. Survival in a changing environment. I think the relationship that we have with the Health Science Center will help solidify our future. I think that with the health reform and whatever form it takes because I'm not sure anyone has a crystal ball yet, there will be change. We've seen as much change in the last eight months of my professional career than I saw in the first 20 years of my professional career.

BLAKE HAILEY: Oh, my.

PHIL SOWA: So there are a whole host of activities that are taking place and we have to be proactive in dealing with them.

BLAKE HAILEY: So you do see the health care changing no matter what happens?

PHIL SOWA: Oh, without question. Without question. And I think we're properly positioned for it. That's key.

BLAKE HAILEY: So you really think we're in good shape to whether whatever changes come our way?

PHIL SOWA: I think because of the nature and the philosophy of osteopathic medicine from a clinical side, and the fact that it's primary-care-driven and the fact that we deal in prevention and we deal in wholeness, I think that's what the community and that's what our populations need. There's obviously going to be enough pathology out there to have specialty requirements, but we have to drive generations. And to drive generations we have to lay a solid foundation. That solid foundation is in primary care.

BLAKE HAILEY: How else do you see your roll changing in the next few years? In the coming months, sounds like to me.

PHIL SOWA: Well, we're becoming much more of a network driven health delivery system. We will participate with larger entities to insure again our own survivability as well as protect the universe of patients that we currently serve. The financial challenges that institutions -- health care institutions face are immense and to position ourselves in a fashion that we can respond effectively and still provide a quality product. These are the challenges that I think every health executive are -- are facing, or is facing.

BLAKE HAILEY: We've covered a lot of ground in a very short amount of time here, Mr. Sowa. Are there some things you'd like to bring up that we haven't discussed?

PHIL SOWA: No. Actually I think that this is -- this is probably -- we have covered the water front pretty thoroughly, I believe.

BLAKE HAILEY: Well, I do appreciate you taking time out of your extremely busy schedule to meet with us, and I want to thank you and know that you'll be a continuing help to the hospital and to the Health Science Center and have done a lot in the past to help as well. I want to thank you and commend you for that.

PHIL SOWA: Well, you're kind to say that. I think the relationship is critical, it's a strong, synergistic relationships, so that both entities both the University of North Texas and the Osteopathic Medical Center of Texas can move with strength in a positive fashion into the 21st century.

BLAKE HAILEY: Well, thank you again and again we appreciate so much of your time and your comments.

PHIL SOWA: Good. Thank you.

BLAKE HAILEY: And with that, we'll conclude this interview. Thank you.