



Clay Johnston

FOREWORD

When I first started telling people I was moving to Austin to help start a new medical school at the University of Texas, I was often met with quizzical looks. “Hasn’t there *always* been a medical school there?” How could it be that the highly educated, progressive, and 11th largest city in the US and the flagship public university of the State of Texas did not have a medical school? The answer to this question is not simple, and it is certainly not dull, with twists and turns, steps forward, and disastrous retreats over decades.

Beginning with a fateful vote in 1881, the State of Texas split its first public medical school, sited in the population center of Galveston, from its flagship university in the capital city. That set in motion a structural division between health and academic campuses that would play out over a hundred years in the growing metropolitan areas of Texas. While seen as an impediment to research and education early on, most famously in Abraham Flexner’s 1910 report on medical education, it remained the standard and a barrier to UT Austin simply starting its own medical school under its large umbrella of programs. Through the decades, many attempts were made to launch a medical school at UT Austin, all with popular support, political maneuvering, and a variety of financial plans, but each of these attempts failed.

Finally, a group of leaders came together in the early 2000s to piece

together a solution, with key roles played by the UT System's Kenneth I. Shine, Executive Vice Chancellor of Health Affairs, and Amy Shaw Thomas, Vice Chancellor and Counsel for Health Affairs. As the architects of the solution and the authors of this book, their insights as insiders are particularly enlightening. There was a host of characters representing an array of civic and private entities, all with different interests. After several good attempts were stymied by natural and economic disasters, it all came together thanks to a resounding vote of support from the citizens of Travis County.

As the inaugural dean at Dell Medical School, I knew that much work had been done well before I arrived on the scene, with the foundations of the school and its mission already stably laid. However, I had no idea of the magnitude and complexity of the work, nor did I appreciate the potential value of learning about failed attempts before the final plan was set in motion. With this history, it is clear to me that those of us arriving after 2014 were simply carpenters building a structure that was designed for success by those who came before us. The mission of Dell Medical School is to revolutionize how people get and stay healthy, and its vision is a vital, inclusive health ecosystem. Ambitious and iconoclastic yet collaborative and community-oriented, these statements may have been written in the post-2014 era, but the concepts were established by those who came before, distilling the spirit of the people of the city and the university. Herein lies the complete story, as told by the two essential architects of a new, shining, audacious medical school at the University of Texas at Austin.

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