

## Access, parking top priorities for Medical Center chief

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Mention the **Texas Medical Center** and most Houstonians' hearts will swell with pride. They are proud of the Center's world-class reputation and they appreciate having the latest treatments for cancer, heart disease and other serious conditions on tap.

But when it comes to actually visiting the Medical Center it's a different story.

That's because getting to and around the Center is not always easy and, having reached the desired location, finding somewhere convenient to park can be difficult. Indeed, hospitals and other health care facilities outside the Medical Center often point to the Center's perceived inaccessibility and parking issues as a reason to seek treatment elsewhere.

It's not surprising, therefore, that finding a solution to those issues is a top priority for Richard Wainerdi, president of Texas Medical Center Corp.

In his 23 years in the post, he has seen the Medical Center grow into the largest concentration of medical institutions in the world. And it's still growing, as the 46 member institutions continue to add or expand facilities and programs on the existing campus as well as on two new campuses stretching south toward the 610 South Loop and west toward State Highway 288.

Wainerdi recently talked with Houston Business Journal reporter Monica Perin about the challenges and opportunities facing the Medical Center.

**HBJ:** Two world-famous heart surgeons at the Medical Center -- Michael DeBakey and Denton Cooley -- recently patched up a bitter, decades-long feud. Trying to lead so many competitive institutions and superstar doctors must be like trying to herd cats.

**WAINERDI:** That comparison has been made before. We are organized differently from most other medical centers, where one person is in charge. Here, each of the 46 institutions is sovereign. They each have their own governing boards which determine their programs.

My job is to serve as a neutral party. It requires a lot of meetings and agreements. The Medical Center Corp. does master planning and coordination of growth and we try to make programs multi-institutional. We try to work carefully with the institutions and we generally get good cooperation.

**HBJ:** How has the Medical Center changed in the time you've been there?

**WAINERDI:** When I came, we were composed of institutions. Now we have eight health care systems, and we are growing dramatically.

The corporation manages a private city that is the 17th-largest downtown in the country. We manage utilities, eight miles of streets, security, maintenance and flood control like a city government. And we provide all kinds of support services like laundry and producing chilled water.

**HBJ:** What are some of the most critical issues you are dealing with now?

**WAINERDI:** We're spending a lot of time trying to figure out ways to get (people) to Highway 288 and the 610 South Loop so we can grow. We just finished a new bridge over Braes Bayou. We have 150,000 people coming here daily, including 73,000 employees and 60,000 patients, but only four bus lines come here. There are eight bus lines going downtown. So it would help to have more bus lines.

**HBJ:** Parking is a problem at the Medical Center. What are you doing about that?

**WAINERDI:** We have 58,000 parking spaces and we have remote parking for employees and students and also for patients. We have 80 acres of remote parking and it's filling up. We're looking at other options like variable work hours and car pooling. With good mass transit, the parking would be adequate.

**HBJ:** Won't these problems just get worse with more growth and expansion?

**WAINERDI:** We have institutions buying and developing land. The corporation also owns 200 undeveloped acres. We're trying to manage and coordinate that growth. We're developing the mid and south campuses now.

**HBJ:** Will they be as dense as the original Medical Center campus?

**WAINERDI:** I think they will be less dense. Density follows need and convenience. There is a need for collaboration of programs and sharing of expensive equipment.

**HBJ:** Many of the Medical Center's institutions are building facilities in outlying areas. How will that affect the Medical Center?

**WAINERDI:** You'll see a growing need to bring primary care closer to where people live. Secondary and tertiary care -- which is what we mostly do -- people will still come here for that.

Many sophisticated and high levels of care are also becoming available in the outlying hospitals and clinics. But that won't change the Medical Center. What will really make a difference is to start changing the paradigm from sickness care to "health" care. The medical institutions are working to help people stay well.

Another thing that is changing is the dramatic reduction in the number of inpatient days. On Fannin Street there are more outpatient surgical facilities than anywhere in the world.

**HBJ:** What are the top priorities on which you are spending most of your time right now?

**WAINERDI:** First, access and mobility -- ways to get people here more conveniently and with a better journey.

Second, efforts to have our institutions become more influential in health policy both nationally and in the state. We're trying to make sure that we are making that contribution.

Third, we spend a lot of energy worrying about flooding and working with the city and Harris County and the flood control districts. We're making progress. It's a big thing.

Fourth, we spend a lot of time thinking about natural and man-made disasters and our response to them.