

Radiotherapy Treatment Planning, Principles and Practice

Dublin, Ireland
May 4-8 2008

Course Director:... **Ola Holmberg**

Having worked as a technologist in radiotherapy planning and brachytherapy for a year and a half, I jumped at the chance to come to one of the ESTRO teaching courses in this field. A couple of my colleagues in Edinburgh had previously attended the same course and it came highly recommended. This was my first experience of an ESTRO course and I enjoyed it very much!

Some 80 delegates from 36 countries attended this course with a good mixture of radiographers, IT personnel, technologists, physicists and oncologists. As well as the course staff, these people provided a wealth of knowledge from their different backgrounds and this was put to good use during group exercises and provided a real interactive element.

The course was spread over four and a half days, with the first day providing a basic scientific and clinical background, and subsequent days focussing on specific sites (prostate, breast, head & neck and lung). Much of the information provided was not new to me, but it was great to have it re-enforced in my mind, as I had not used some of it since my training (especially the radiobiology!). It was good to see how things have also moved on in recent years as we were shown updates on, for example, ICRU recommendations and image acquisition. All the teaching staff was enthusiastic about their subjects and eager to answer any questions - of which there were many. I was very impressed that many of the teaching staff were more than able to deliver their material in a language other than their own - a huge undertaking in itself that puts us Brits to shame!

The planning software used in the afternoons was the only area where I think there was a little room for improvement. Some of this was quite difficult to use and quite a lot of time was spent trying to ensure that everyone from different backgrounds was going at the same speed. However, the principles taught were useful and I understand that the software is to be updated for next year's course. There were also exhibitions hosted by the sponsors Nucletron, Elekta and Varian, although these were possibly not as well attended as they might have been due to the fantastic heat wave Dublin experienced while we were there!

Of course, Dublin is a great place to host such an event. As I was travelling alone, I was initially quite nervous, but I need not have worried. I made a good friend from the Czech Republic when we registered, and as he had previously spent some time in Dublin, he became my personal tour guide! The icebreaking session on Monday was a great way to socialise and make some fantastic new friends, and perhaps consideration could be given to holding this on the Sunday evening, right at the start of the course. There were also a few sore heads on the Tuesday in time for the Irish night (nothing to do with the Guinness of course)! This was a lovely evening with Irish singing and dancing providing the focus both during and after a delicious meal! Viviane, the co-ordinator, did a fantastic job of getting people up dancing - even to the classic "birdie dance" which I'm slightly embarrassed to

say that I was a part of (hopefully there are no pictures)! Towards the end of the evening I was also very impressed by the huge number of Irish songs that Ola, the course director, was able to sing word for word!

In summary, I would recommend this course to anyone who is starting out in treatment planning as it provides an excellent clinical base to build on. It is not often that you get the opportunity to meet such a wide variety of people with a common interest and to establish valuable contacts for the future. My thanks to all the staff and students involved for making this a very interesting and beneficial week.

Tiffany West

Clinical Technologist, Edinburgh Cancer Centre