ESTRO

Presidential Election 2022

Interview with Matthias Guckenberger

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1. **What is your vision of radiotherapy? Does the strategy of the European SocieTy for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) resonate with your vision and your perspective for the future?**

Radiotherapy, or a better term would be radiation oncology, provides high value to our cancer patients and our societies as an evidence-based and cost-effective treatment in curative and palliative settings. Will radiation oncology remain a relevant partner in multidisciplinary cancer care in the future? Yes! Our strength in basic, translational, and clinical research, as well as in research dissemination, education and training, and in quality-controlled implementation, will enable us to meet the requirements of the rapidly changing landscape of cancer care. As a non-invasive outpatient treatment modality, radiation oncology is ideally suited for, e.g., organ preservation, to treat an ageing population, or for repetitive interventions if we consider cancer to be a chronic disease. Oligometastatic disease - my own field of research - is one in which optimal radiotherapy integrated into innovative multimodal treatment concepts has offered new possibilities for our patients and our discipline. Therefore, truly and fully, I share the vision of the European SocieTy for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) of radiation oncology as offering “optimal health for all, together”, and I will continue to treat its implementation as of high priority.

2. **What do you perceive to be the most pressing issues or challenges that face ESTRO as a radiation oncology society today?**

1) ESTRO is defined by and “lives” because of its members. Therefore, it must remain attractive if it is to draw in the next generation of talented researchers, clinicians, medical

physicists, radiobiologists and radiation therapists (RTTs) to join the Society. More agile governance structures and strengthened bottom-up mechanisms within ESTRO could provide members who have innovative research interests with the necessary space to develop themselves along with our Society.

2) The pandemic has shown that our Society is financially vulnerable because it depends for income on the annual conference. This challenge can be addressed through diversification, long-term strategic investment planning according to our vision, and evaluation of external funding possibilities (e.g., by the European Union for ESTRO`s training and education programmes).

3) Rapid developments in precision medicine and systemic therapies might challenge traditional indications for radiotherapy. Simultaneously, it is becoming more difficult to gain funds for clinical trials and associated translational research. The members of ESTRO all have competencies in clinical, technological, biological and IT-related research to continuously innovate to ensure the optimal use of radiation oncology; so we should evaluate whether and how ESTRO can push forward from the European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC)-ESTRO radiation infrastructure for Europe (E^2-RADIatE) programme.

3. **If you are elected ESTRO president, what will be your goal(s) or the focus area for your term? What priorities would help you to achieve them? What barriers could be in your way?**
   How do you envision the future of the interdisciplinary aspect of our Society?
   How do you envision the future of the multidisciplinary aspect of the oncology field and ESTRO positioning on that matter?

Even though this question asks about my own goals and focus areas, firstly I would interpret the role of ESTRO president as being able to deliver strong service and commitment to our Society and its members. I would listen carefully to the needs of our Society and all its disciplines, and I would seek regular exchange with partner societies and all relevant stakeholders to position and promote our Society, our disciplines, and our members.

There are three areas in which I have identified exciting opportunities for ESTRO and which I would like to prioritise.

1) ESTRO has taken several steps beyond science dissemination. I would build on the experiences of, e.g., the health economics in radiation oncology (HERO) study and E^2-RADIatE, so that ESTRO could become a partner that would facilitate and complement the

research of our members. This would include ESTRO's guideline activities, where collaboration and planning with other societies is of high strategic relevance.

(2) ESTRO could benefit from a systematic approach to identify and enable the next generation of teachers, course directors and Society leaders; I would propose a project to initiate such a programme. This project should also address how ESTRO can develop its strengths in diversity, equity and inclusion.

(3) As mentioned above, the broad nature of the skill sets of researchers within ESTRO is a strong asset. The Groupe Européen de Curiethérapie (GEC)-ESTRO or physics workshop formats have proven successful and could be expanded with interdisciplinary workshops aiming to address clinical problems that could not be solved by one discipline alone. A first focus topic could be strengthening clinical trial activities in radiation oncology and associated translational research.

Potential barriers to achieving these goals would be financial restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, longer than expected processes for consensus definition in our interdisciplinary Society and tightening time resources of all ESTRO members. Distribution of responsibilities to more members and making optimal use of virtual meetings would not only remove some of these barriers but would simultaneously improve participation within ESTRO and improve work-life balance for all our members, irrespective of their age and career stage.

The interdisciplinary nature of ESTRO as one club for clinicians, medical physicists, radiobiologists and RTTs is in its genetic code. This multilateral aspect does require time, resources, and compromises. However, ESTRO with all its disciplines has generated and will generate sufficient synergy to counterbalance these concerns. This is my strong belief; this is what I strive for. As one example, I cannot think of any society that is better positioned to take optimal advantage of artificial intelligence.

My own clinical research fields of lung cancer and oligometastatic disease are characterised by close multidisciplinary collaboration; advances in precision medicine, including radiotherapy, have substantially improved outcomes. Although these fields are highly competitive, the arrival of innovations such as stereotactic body radiotherapy (SBRT) has strengthened the standing of radiation oncology. ESTRO has actively contributed to this development through the initiation of E^2-RADIatE and OligoCare as joint projects between ESTRO and EORTC. I consider that this is a successful strategy that should be evaluated for other fields in multidisciplinary cancer care.

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4. In your opinion, is ESTRO doing enough to improve patients' outcomes?

ESTRO's vision statement puts the patient at the centre of our efforts to achieve optimal health for all. It is my impression that most, if not all, projects and initiatives within ESTRO do follow this vision statement. However, I see potential to operationalise our vision further by aiming for projects to be aligned with each other; many synchronised small steps should be complemented with a few high-impact leaps forward. In addition, ESTRO might benefit from regular input and advice from patient representatives to our conference and meeting programmes, projects, and guidelines, since ultimately, it is not my opinion or that of our Society that matters, but the opinions, wishes and expectations of our patients.

5. Why should ESTRO members vote for you to be the next president? Why did you decide to run for this position?

I have served our Society in various leadership positions, contributed to many projects, and enjoyed the time I have dedicated to ESTRO´s activities. However, I have also struggled with the complexity of ESTRO's governance and identified clear opportunities for improvement. These experiences have enabled me to gain a deep insight into ESTRO and have strengthened my enthusiasm and optimism that ESTRO is THE place to develop and shape the future of radiation oncology, together with dear friends and colleagues.

My training in Germany, my research fellowship in the UK and my current work in Switzerland, along with my awareness that most research is performed through international collaborations, have shaped my mindset to think beyond borders and boundaries. Much of my research (e.g., in image-guided radiotherapy – IGRT – and adaptive radiotherapy; radiotherapy effect modelling; and stereotactic body radiotherapy – SBRT) and education activities (ESTRO IGRT and SBRT courses) are characterised by their interdisciplinary nature and I would interpret my presidency in the same way.

6. Could you tell us about your current and past involvement in ESTRO? What made you become involved in the first place?

An invitation to teach in the ESTRO IGRT course in 2008 was my first step into the Society. This course showed me the spirit of ESTRO and I found colleagues who I can call good friends today. Since then, I have had the opportunity to contribute to our Society as a member of the ESTRO board, the scientific council, and the scientific board of the Green

Journal. I have been honoured to initiate several projects: the ESTRO SBRT course, which is co-chaired by Dirk Verellen (medical physics); the OligoCare project, a collaboration between ESTRO and EORTC; and the production of joint guidelines between the American Society for Radiation Oncology and ESTRO. As ESTRO President, I would aim to enable the next generation of projects, which will become opportunities for the next generation of ESTRO members.

7. On a lighter note, what do you like to do for fun?

Until I started university, I was an ambitious decathlete and spent most of my time on sports fields or in competitions. Although I have lost the fitness I had in those days, I have kept my love for all kinds of sports activities (and the mindset of a sportsman). Together with my wife and our three children, we spend as much time as possible together running or taking part in athletics, football, cycling, skiing or hiking. I am a hobby photographer, sometimes testing the patience of my family. Unfortunately, most of my reading has become scientific, legal or management-related; the last two books I read and very much enjoyed were *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* by Haruki Murakami and *Das wirkliche Leben* by Adeline Dieudonné.