Best Brachytherapy Award

Monica Serban
Department of Oncology
Aarhus University Hospital
Aarhus, Denmark
Radiation Medicine Program
Princess Margaret Cancer Centre
Toronto, Canada

What does this award mean to you?

Receiving this award is a wonderful token of appreciation and recognition of the importance of what I do. It is an honour for me, and I want to express my gratitude on behalf of the team I collaborated with to develop this work.

To whom would you like to dedicate your award?

I would like to dedicate this award to my son Matthias and my husband Jan. Over many years, I spent countless hours combining a busy clinical job with graduate studies, research and being a mother and a wife, and they have been so kind, so patient and loving with me. I am also grateful, and I'd like to thank Dr. Kari Tanderup for welcoming me to her research group, for her mentorship and for the joy of working together.

What have been the highlights of your career?

My goal has always been to use applied physics in medicine to improve the quality of patient care. I started my career using my physics and engineering background in non-destructive testing working for a company in the energy sector. Some years later, I discovered medical physics and retrained as a medical physicist to become part of a medical team and enter the frontline of patient care. My specialisation is brachytherapy, which is an effective cancer treatment modality and the earliest form of radiotherapy; it dates back to the discovery of radium in 1898 by Marie and Pierre Curie. One of the highlights of my career has been to work with and learn from the team that studies MRI-guided brachytherapy in locally advanced cervical cancer (EMBRACE) and engage in research on cervical cancer. My published research is based on the EMBRACE-I study, which was the first prospective, multi-institutional, observational cohort study that aimed to benchmark MRI-based image-guided brachytherapy in locally advanced cervical cancer.

What is your next challenge?

Given the complexity and the real-time nature of brachytherapy treatments, there is a need for automation in order to generate consistent, high-quality treatment plans more quickly than it is possible now. The overarching aim of my research is to improve brachytherapy treatment planning and applicator/technique selection, and to investigate and look at implementing new dose-spatial metrics for vaginal dose reporting and correlation with morbidity. So, my next challenge is to seek funds to support my future research in this area.

If you hadn't been a scientist, what would you like to have been?

If I hadn't been a scientist, I would have probably chosen a profession that involved more direct patient interaction, such as physiotherapy or general medicine. As a brachytherapy physicist, I have been closely involved with direct patient care. But overall, I am very satisfied with my career path.

What do you do in your spare time?

I enjoy doing yoga and martial arts. In recent months I started to practise qigong, a traditional Chinese medicine regime that uses breathing, gentle fluid moves, and meditation. I appreciate the time to reconnect with myself and to train my mind and body to relax and better focus. I love to travel and visit new places. So, when time allows, I won't hesitate to pack up and go!