



CONFERENCES

ESTRO-Varian award



Sofia Spampinato
Aarhus University Hospital
Aarhus, Denmark

What do you think are the next challenges for radiation oncologists (or radiation physicists, radiobiologists, radiotherapists, brachytherapists)?

I believe that our field is extremely multidisciplinary and that this represents a great strength but also a great challenge for our community. Combining all these different professionals in order to improve treatment is not always easy. Sometimes we risk losing the big picture of the problem. I therefore believe that each of us who are involved not only in research but also in the clinic should leave the comfort zone of our own fields and be open to the interdisciplinarity that is the keystone of a more comprehensive approach. It is also important to integrate research into clinical practice in order to adapt it to different conditions, as not all institutions have the same resources. Finally, active involvement of patients is also a crucial point.

What does this award mean to you?

I am so happy and honoured to have received the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO)-Varian award. It represents confirmation of the choice I made four years ago, when I decided to leave Italy for the first time to undertake a PhD in Denmark under the supervision of Kari Tanderup. Despite the initial difficulties, the cold weather and a different culture, I can say that this was the best decision of my life. I have always loved both medicine and physics and I studied to become a clinical medical physicist. I would never have thought of myself as a full-time researcher, and now here I am as a post-doc. I don't know yet whether I will go back to being a clinical medical physicist, but I'm sure I will always want to be involved in research.

To whom would you like to dedicate your award?

There are so many people to whom I would like to dedicate this award, so I will make a list and I hope not to forget anyone. Professor Tanderup, who saw a spark during our first Skype interview and trusted me from the very beginning, supporting my every idea, even the most bizarre; Lars Fokdal and Jacob Lindegaard, who have helped me a lot with their remarkable clinical experience; the network of the European and international study on MRI-guided brachytherapy in locally advanced cervical cancer (EMBRACE), which is made up of great interdisciplinary professionals from all around the world and of which it has been and continues to be an honour to be part; our patients, who have helped to improve the treatment for locally advanced cervical cancer; my supervisors in Italy, Anna Gueli and Luigi Raffaele, who trained me during my university years in Sicily; and finally, my family and friends, who have always supported my choices.

What has been your involvement within ESTRO?

I first joined ESTRO in 2017 as an in-training member. Since then I have participated in many interesting and educational courses. I have also participated in ESTRO conferences since 2018, as well as in GEC-ESTRO workshops, which offer a wonderful opportunity for scientific sharing but also networking. I hope in the future to be more actively involved, especially in the field of side-effects after radiotherapy. During ESTRO 2020, I attended the interesting talk by Claudio Fiorino, with whom I had the pleasure of collaborating, on the potential role of the medical physicist in this field. I am particularly interested in the complex impact of side-effects on the quality-of-life of patients.

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

A great passion of mine since I was a child is art in all its forms. I consider myself quite a creative person and have always lived a little bit in my own world. I like to create stories and see the world from different perspectives. I believe that a fair amount of creativity is required to study physics and to take part in science, and maybe that's why I took this path. But if things had turned out differently... who knows! Maybe I would have embarked on a different career that was oriented towards art, animation or literature, which still remain my great passions. However, I am happy to have undertaken this path that continues to trigger my interest every day and I am happy to include that pinch of "colour" in my research as well.

