Honorary Physicist Award

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What does this award mean to you?

This award means a lot to me personally; it is a great honour that my work has been recognised by the international peer community.

I have had the privilege to work with some of the best physicists in the field of radiation oncology over the last two decades and I feel humbled to be recognised as 'one of them'.

To whom would you like to dedicate your award?

I would like to dedicate this award to the physicist and radiotherapist community, with a special mention for The Christie team. Without them, we could not deliver the high-quality treatment and research from which patients with cancer all around the world benefit.

I also dedicate the award to my family, who have supported me throughout my career. Those who know me well are aware that I like to talk about the challenges of achieving a good work-life balance when working as a clinical academic. However, I have had an amazing and exciting career so far and if I had my time again I would not make a different choice.

What is your next challenge?

I am moving in a new direction with research after two decades of being involved in classic, randomised controlled trials. We are now investigating the use of real-time, high-quality, real-world data to evaluate the impact of changes made to the radiotherapy pathway. This will enable us to perform more pragmatic and inclusive research that will provide evidence of the effects of treatments in populations of patients who are usually excluded from clinical trials, such as those from deprived backgrounds, the elderly or those with multiple medical conditions. I am very fortunate to work with an amazing group of physicists at The Christie to develop this programme of research.

What have been the highlights of your career?

I am very proud to have led and collaborated in several practice-changing studies, particularly in the field of small-cell lung cancer. These studies have had an impact on international guidelines and have helped to standardise the treatment of this disease of unmet need internationally.

Recently, I was delighted to be awarded funding for studies that embrace novel methodologies in the field of real-world data/rapid learning (the RAPID-RT study) and the combination of drugs and radical radiotherapy in stage III non-small-cell lung cancer (CONCORDE trial).

I am also very proud to have received the Jim Cox Award from the International Association for the Study of Lung Cancer in 2019 and to be one of those to be named as an Honorary physicist by the European SocieTy for Radiotherapy and Oncology at this meeting.

What do you think are the next challenges for the radiation oncology community?

The next challenge for the radiation oncology community is to demonstrate the clinical benefit of artificial intelligence (AI), both as part of the automation of the radiotherapy pathway and for the personalisation of treatment that is based on predictive models. There is a need to embrace new methodologies to evaluate the impact of AI, such as the use of pragmatic randomised studies or rapid learning. There is also a pressing need to understand the barriers that block the implementation of AI. In my view, one of the most important challenges relates to clinical engagement; there is a reluctance to embrace AI, mostly due to a lack of evidence of benefit to patients or radiotherapy departments. There are also concerns regarding the loss of skills for radiation oncologists and risks of medical liability. As a community, we need to work hard to provide this much-needed evidence. I am very interested to discover ways in which AI can help to improve clinical decision-making in underserved populations.