



CONFERENCES

Honorary member award



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What does this award mean to you?

I would like to thank the Council of the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) council for the award. I think that it illustrates the generosity and openness of this society that it acknowledges professionals from other specialities working with its members. I feel deeply honoured, and I think it means that my work has been perceived as useful and meaningful to ESTRO, which is truly gratifying for me.

What have been the highlights of your career?

Perhaps the key decision that defined my career was the choice of epidemiology as my medical speciality at the end of my pre-graduate training. The late 1970s and 1980s were times of change in Spain, and I thought that population health was a good choice for me so that I could contribute to the improvement of people's health. I was lucky to be able to join a team working on cardiovascular epidemiology and chronic disease prevention in the hospital where I was trained, under the leadership of Dr Balaguer Vintró, an excellent cardiologist who collaborated with the international leaders in the field. We began working on two international collaborative projects, so my training in epidemiology was really highly practical, and I combined it with a master's degree and, later, a doctorate.

In 1989, I had the opportunity to work on cancer control at the Department of Health, and I accepted without really knowing the consequences. Initially, the work focused on cancer prevention and screening for breast cancer. However, some months later I was asked to find out why there were waiting lists in radiation oncology departments and what could be done, which at that time was a political issue. My contact with radiation oncologists and the field started then. It seems impossible now, 32 years later!

The third main change was to move from the Department of Health to the Catalan Institute of Oncology, which started its autonomous activity in 1995. First I worked as head of the cancer prevention and control unit, and in January 1997, as director of the institute. This was a major change for me; I needed to understand the complexities of the management of a brand new institute, working in close cooperation with the university teaching hospital across the street. These were very challenging but exciting times, with opportunities to implement organisational changes, such as the introduction of the first network of cancer care in Spain, which involved multidisciplinary teams of surgeons, pathologists and radiologists in addition to medical and radiation oncologists for the most important tumour sites.

I stepped down as director 10 years later, in 2006, and since 2008 I've worked as director of the Catalan cancer plan and as scientific coordinator of the Spanish Cancer Strategy. Then I moved back to the planning and evaluation of cancer services, which was an opportunity to look at cancer control from a different perspective, with some time for thinking.

What has been your involvement within ESTRO?

I have been working with ESTRO mostly on the health economics in radiation oncology (HERO) project, which is chaired by Yolande Lievens (chair in radiation oncology, Ghent University Hospital, Ghent, Belgium) and Cai Grau (research director of Danish Centre of Particle Therapy, Aarhus University Hospital, Aarhus, Denmark). My involvement started with the application of an epidemiological approach to the assessment of the need for external beam radiotherapy treatment in all European countries. This enabled an assessment to be performed of the optimal use, which was based on the work of the Australian collaboration for cancer outcomes research and evaluation (CCORE) team with Michael Barton (head of cancer research, Faculty of Medicine, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia) and Geoff Delaney (director of cancer services, South Western Sydney Local Health District, Sydney, Australia), and a comparison with actual use. The gap in radiation oncology is clear. My parallel work with European cancer plans in different EU joint actions has also been a valuable learning process for me, and hopefully it's useful for the national societies of radiation oncology. Nowadays, I am really interested in working on the new chapter on value-based radiation oncology with Ajay Aggarwal (consultant oncologist, Guys and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK), Cai Grau and Yolande Lievens.

What do you do in your spare time?

I must say that I am quite conventional. I love reading literature and walking; I also like going to exhibitions of modern and contemporary art, especially if travelling. It gives me a feeling that I am doing something other than working.

