



CONFERENCES

Lifetime achievement awards



Roberto Orecchia
Scientific director
European Institute of Oncology
Milan, Italy

What do you think are the next challenges for radiation oncologists?

To date, radiation oncology has achieved great precision in the planning and delivery of treatment. Innovations are being made continuously and the role of radiation oncology as an essential component of cancer management is increasing. The moves towards gene expression profiling, molecular targeting, imaging analytics, machine learning and artificial intelligence have pioneered an era of increasingly effective therapies that target cancer on a biological basis. The time is now ripe to make radiation oncology fully adaptive by embracing the biological behaviour of tumours, considering their different potentials and pathways for recurrence. This broader concept of adaptive radiation oncology, which goes beyond the technical definition, has already gained ground among radiation oncologists, and the next great challenge for us will be to adapt radiation treatment fully to the individual patient by considering more accurate risk stratification that is based on biology.

What does this award mean to you?

I am really delighted to receive the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) lifetime achievement award, which is not only a permanent reminder of a personal honour, but also a great success for both the European Institute of Oncology and the University of Milan, where I worked for many, many years, and for all the people who have collaborated with me over this long period. Five years ago I was awarded the ESTRO Regaud medal, which was again an incredible honour for me, and today I can say that another dream has come true, which is to be recognised as a person who has dedicated all his professional life to radiation oncology for the benefit of cancer patients.

What has been your involvement within ESTRO?

My adventure with ESTRO began more than 30 years ago during my early career in radiation oncology, when I started to attend ESTRO courses and meetings. The educational value of these events was very high for me, as they provided significant additions to what I could learn within my national context, especially in terms of real, multidisciplinary, and comprehensive views of patient care and research. Later, I had the opportunity to serve ESTRO as a member of the board for three years, as a local organiser of one Groupe Européen de Curiethérapie (GEC)-ESTRO meeting, as a teacher of several educational courses, as a reviewer for the Green Journal, as a work-package coordinator of the European particle therapy network (EPTN), and in other roles. My experiences in the frame of the ESTRO community, with a continuous exchange of new ideas and the ESTRO Vision, was very useful during my career, and helped me to realise many projects, such as the first University School for Radiation Oncologists in Milan, the largest centre of radiation therapy in Italy, one of the three centres for proton and carbon ions in Europe, and now, the new proton centre in Milan, which is under construction.

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

My interest in science, and especially in medicine, started early. I always had a great curiosity to understand how the human body worked, and why you get sick now and then. As an alternative, I wanted to be an astrophysicist. When Neil Armstrong went to the moon I was 17; I was fascinated by that exploit and, more generally, I was interested in studying the mysteries of the universe. However, there are many things in common between the cosmos and radiation; now I am happy to have chosen to take care of the latter!

When do you think you will retire, and what would you like to do then?

I am continuing to deal with research and teaching and have reduced my activity in the clinic, although I continue to follow my patients. I still have the position of scientific director at the European Institute of Oncology, and this work takes up much of my time. But I hope to have more time for myself and my loved ones in the future.

