



COVID-19 Preparedness for Radiotherapy Departments - Towards Consensus on Best Practices

I was invited by the International Atomic Energy Agency to take part in an international expert panel discussion on 'COVID-19 Preparedness for Radiotherapy Departments - Towards Consensus on Best Practices' on April 3, 2020. The other panel members were:

Pierfrancesco Franco (Italy)
Yavuz Anacak (Turkey)
Waleed Mourad (USA)
Hannah Simonds (South Africa)
Iain Ward (New Zealand)
Aileen Flavin (Ireland)
Mack Roach (USA)
Elena Fidarova (World Health Organisation, Switzerland)
Hugo Marsiglia (Chile)
Shyam Shrivastava (India)
Soehartati Gondhowiardjo (Indonesia)
Arthur Accioly Rosa (Brazil)

A number of professional societies were represented by these experts including but not limited to the WHO, Latin American Association of Radiation Oncology (ALATRO), European School of Oncology (ESO), National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN-USA), National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP-Ireland) and the South African Society of Clinical and Radiation Oncology (SASCRO).

The focus of the webinar at this relatively early stage of the Covid-19 pandemic for the majority of countries was to discuss how best radiation therapy departments could prepare. As the only radiotherapist (RTT) on the panel, my focus was on how RTT practice was likely to change and practical guidance on how RTTs could manage this. The issue of personal protective equipment (PPE) for RTTs was the main area that I highlighted. RTTs are frontline staff and without them, treatment simply ceases. Therefore, protection of RTTs with PPE was a main discussion point. So too were the logistics of managing the department during such a crisis, focusing on minimisation of the number of RTT staff present in the department while maintaining quality and safety, creation of distinct treatment teams without crossover from one unit to another and separation of patients to distinct linear accelerators without crossover from one to another. The main points raised in this discussion are now available in a European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) RTT Committee infographic available at: <https://www.estro.org/About/Newsroom/News/COVID-19-RECOMMENDATIONS-FOR-RTTS-ESTRO-RTT-COMMIT#>

Remote working was also discussed at the webinar, with much focus by the radiation oncologists on telehealth, remaining cognisant that vast areas of the world do not have the means to conduct remote patient consultations or to create treatment plans from home.

Another important aspect for discussion was the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on patients and their families. Having a cancer diagnosis is already a time of great stress and anxiety and the possibility that treatment may be cancelled or postponed is causing numerous patients untold anxiety. This was discussed in detail by Professor Soehartati Gondhowiardjo from Indonesia.

The webinar was recorded and can be accessed at: <https://humanhealth.iaea.org/HHW/covid19/webinars.html>

Finally, I would like sincerely to thank my RTT colleagues, Phillipp Scherer from Salzburg and Maddalena Rossi from Amsterdam for their invaluable insight into current RTT life on the frontline. This subject provided me with very useful discussion points during this webinar.



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