Report from the RTT track, ESTRO 2022

The 2022 congress of the European SocieTy for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO) recently convened from 6-10 May in Copenhagen, Denmark. This year's onsite attendance was closer to pre-pandemic levels than last year's with 365 radiation therapists (RTTs) present at ESTRO 2022. With COVID-19 no longer at the forefront of our minds, attention turned to the theme of this year's congress – 'learning from every patient'.

Over the course of five days, RTTs seized opportunities to present advances and developments in current practice in which the provision of patient-centred care is very much the focus of our profession.

Johan De Munter, president of the European Oncology Nursing Society, from Ghent, Belgium, kicked things off on Saturday morning with an important discussion on patient information and the use of social media, oncology platforms and other tools as a basis for education. Patients access information readily in the online environment and as RTTs we must view our role as pivotal in the provision of 'dynamic' rather than 'static' details, using these information resources.

The symposium called 'Learning about the patients we do not see: a focus on inequities in radiotherapy access and provision' was one of the most talked-about sessions of the weekend. With radiation-therapy services in a constant state of development, May Abdel-Wahab from the International Atomic Energy Agency reminded us that disparities in access to RT services are a constant problem, since low-to-middle-income countries lack the infrastructure and education to provide their populations with adequate radiotherapy services. Naman Julka-Anderson, an advanced practice radiographer from London, UK, reminded us that more work was required to reduce ethnic disparities in radiotherapy outcomes – in particular, the provision of appropriate patient management to manage skin reaction across all skin tones.

The themes of online adaptive and personalised radiotherapy had a strong presence across the programme with patient experiences to date informing 'where we are now' and 'where we can go' with these developments. Nigel Anderson, a radiation therapy manager from Victoria, Australia; Aileen Dufton, lead research radiographer from the Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre, Glasgow, UK; and Lijanne Otto-Vollaard, a senior radiation therapist from the Erasmus Medical Center in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, provided an update on advanced practice and how essential it is if we are to support the maximum use of these innovations in radiotherapy practice.

Artificial intelligence (AI) in radiotherapy was discussed across the programme. Caitlin Gillan of the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre in Toronto, Canada, stated that we were "drowning in repetitive, rule-based tasks" and that AI should be embraced to facilitate efficient use of resources. Mary Coffey of Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, followed by arguing that a proactive rather than a reactive approach to our educational curriculums is needed to reflect the continued emergence of AI in radiotherapy practice. Michelle Leech, also of Trinity College Dublin, moderated an excellent panel discussion in which the question 'Artificial Intelligence: friend or foe of the RTT?' was addressed by an international group of RTTs. Dr Leech was awarded the Emmanuel van der Schueren award during the opening ceremony for her outstanding contribution to the field.

During the closing session, Yatman Tsang, consultant radiographer at the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre in the UK, contributed to the discussion regarding which innovations would have the greatest impact on radiotherapy by 2030. The future is bright for the radiation therapist – let's keep the momentum going and continue to provide the best possible care for our patients.

Maeve Kearney
Assistant Professor
Applied Radiation Therapy Group,
Discipline of Radiation Therapy
Trinity College Dublin
Ireland
mkearne@tcd.ie