



SCHOOL

Course Report

Best practice in radiation oncology Train the radiation therapist trainers - Part I

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Hello. My name is Dimitar Katsarov and I work as a radiation oncologist at the Radiation Oncology Clinic at the University Hospital of Oncology in Sofia, Bulgaria (formerly known as the National Cancer Institute Bulgaria). Apart from clinical work with different cancer diseases, I am involved in teaching basic oncology and radiotherapy to radiotherapy technicians during undergraduate courses in Sofia.

My participation in the course, which was organised by the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology and the International Atomic Energy Agency, was prompted by my desire to - and the need to - improve how the different professionals involved in the radiotherapy of patients, and specifically radiotherapy laboratory technicians, interact. Techniques for application of radiation therapy have evolved extremely rapidly and this necessitates that new developments be integrated into both the teaching of students and the building of new skills and competencies of already practising RTTs.

Although radiotherapy is recognised as a distinct profession, many in the field are increasingly convinced that RTTs must develop alongside other medical professionals in a unified way. The integration of medicine and technical advances in the application of radiotherapy requires specific knowledge and skills in each aspect of radiotherapy. Although RTTs work under the guidance of physicians and physicists, the specificity of their work requires focused and profession-specific training, the building of communication skills, and continuous maintenance of qualifications through the completion of a specific curriculum and subsequent specialisation. The most valuable part of this course was learning and acquiring knowledge on how this could be implemented.

Participation in the course showed what is needed to establish professionals successfully in the field of radiotherapy. An important focus was the development of practical models in the teaching of knowledge and skills tailored to the audience and how, over time, all this could be built upon through the organisation of workshops and courses at both the theoretical and practical levels. The practical sessions would involve the use of specific equipment, software and immobilisation devices.

After I attended the course, I feel I have a stronger understanding and motivation to improve training in radiotherapy. The practical guidance on setting up courses and practical activities at different levels was particularly valuable. The advice ranged from courses run only in a specific department to those run nationally and covered how they could be organised regularly over time.

During the course, it became clear to what extent each education system is specific. While respecting the particulars of each country, the development of technology requires the creation of mechanisms for postgraduate training and the maintenance of qualifications. The operation of modern radiotherapy clinics is difficult without well-trained RTTs. Basic academic training should be upgraded with interdisciplinary knowledge in radiation oncology and medical physics. Training in the use of any appliance solution should be vendor-based, but RTTs require a solid foundation of knowledge and skills to be competent professionals.

It is important to participate in this course because it provides practical knowledge on how interdisciplinary interaction of radiotherapy specialists can be organised. Phased learning can be complemented by the organisation of meetings and on-site training events at different levels, for which the ongoing support of academia, national oncology societies and professional societies of each country should be sought. This will also naturally support international cooperation.



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