Course Report

Comprehensive and practical brachytherapy course

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My name is Blanca Angélica Soto Martinez, and I am a Radiation Oncologist at the San José Hospital and Zambrano TecSalud in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico. It's a pleasure for me to share my experience of the last *Comprehensive and practical brachytherapy course* with other members of the European SocieTy for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO). The course took place at the Hospital Español last June in our beautiful Mexico City.

I think brachytherapy is like a work of art; for the artist to perform well, they must perfect their technique, know very well all the tools and applicators, different anatomic treatment methods, and even some secrets to do a very special job. Brachytherapy is not as popular in my country as in others, which is why I was interested to take this course. I also knew the great value and warranty of ESTRO courses.

The course consisted of five days of intense academic activities, with the opportunity to learn from the brilliant European school of brachytherapy. We shared clinical experiences and everyday challenges that face physicists and dosimetrists.
Before the course, we received homework that comprised two cases of contouring, one of prostate cancer and one of cervical cancer. We worked with EduCase software, which is a very intuitive and friendly platform with which to contour. Working with it is very comfortable.

In my opinion, a helpful brachytherapy course must be focused on the practice so that participants can become familiar with and identify the applicators, and interact with the attachments and the possible ways to use them. This was achieved through collaboration with the companies Elekta, Varian and Cyber Robotics. Representatives of each of the companies explained the best experiences of assistants and the advantages of their applicators, while a member of the ESTRO faculty was with each stand to be part of the experience, to clarify doubts and to explain to us each technique and the best way to achieve the optimum result. We worked in groups with phantoms so that we had sufficient time to complete each task. We discussed with a physicist the planning and distribution of the doses so that we could experience the patient's full journey from admission to discharge. These activities enabled us to understand all the information and to work around a brachytherapy case.

This course covered all the topics. It was very balanced in content and we discussed many clinical topics and physics. Videos and photographs were provided with examples. The assistants also offered useful contributions; at the end of each intervention, they asked questions and made comments to the teacher.

The programme included many kinds of cancer; for example, breast, prostate, cervical, endometrial, oesophageal, skin, paediatric and cancers of the oral cavity. Imaging studies were also discussed. We discovered that despite a lack of availability of some equipment in some countries, we could do our work with the technology we had and it was not necessary to have the most expensive equipment. An example was ultrasound equipment.

We were an interested and interesting audience, always looking to increase our knowledge of brachytherapy. I think more brachytherapy experts are needed worldwide, who are passionate about the subject and keen to teach it, just like the extraordinary team of professors who taught this ESTRO course.

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