



ESTRO 2021: for 2021 standards, this congress was (a)live: perspective of a radiation oncologist onsite

I must admit that I was not sure whether I would attend the 2021 congress of the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO 2021) onsite or online. I have not attended any large events in the last year and a half. The prospect of going to a congress in a venue full of participants from around the globe gave me a feeling of excitement but also some discomfort.

It took two colleagues to convince me to go: Professor Philip Poortmans (radiation oncologist at Iridium Kankernetwerk, Antwerp, Belgium) and Professor Dirk Verellen (head of medical physics at the same site), two big ESTRO enthusiasts and very active members. "It will be fun," they said, followed by "it's important for the society that people attend live".

Were they right?
YES and YES.

Yes, it was nice to be able finally to attend a congress onsite, listen to and see the speakers live (although a lot of the talks were prerecorded) and ask questions and receive answers live. I always concentrate better, and I feel more involved, at a live congress than in front of my computer screen. Furthermore, while I was in Madrid, I was able to see the Guernica at Museo Reina Sofia and enjoy some of Madrid's rooftop restaurants and fine food. So, they were right, it was definitely fun.

And Yes, I do believe that it is important for our society members to be able to meet each other live so that we can make connections and exchange ideas both for clinical work and research. The annual ESTRO meeting is an ideal platform for this purpose. Another important networking opportunity, of course, is the industry exhibition. It provides a good opportunity to interact with industry partners and to find out about the latest developments in technology, which is an important part of our work and society.

But how (a)live was ESTRO 2021 and are there benefits to keeping the congress hybrid (both online and onsite) in the future?

The capacity of the venue was reduced to about 50% of normal, which resulted in a smaller number of participants and fewer live speakers than normal; I guess that 25-40% of the lectures I attended were prerecorded. However, there were many questions from the audience and from online viewers, which ensured interaction and live discussion. So, by 2021 standards, this congress was as (a)live as it gets!

The ability to ask questions online was not the only advantage of the hybrid format. I was able to attend the congress only from Friday to Sunday. However, thanks to the online platform, where sessions in digital format are made available for both the live and the online attendees, I was able to view the sessions I missed (such as the young track) later at home. I also believe that this digital format will give young people more opportunity to attend and see the presentations. For the younger members of our society, the costs of attending a congress such as ESTRO are high. Keeping this hybrid format in the future will give them the opportunity to attend the congress online and to see all the presentations without the costs of flights and hotels.

Of course, at a later stage in their career, they should listen to their older colleagues and attend the congress live, because it is fun and important for our organisation!

See you onsite in Copenhagen at ESTRO 2022!



Daan Nevens, MD, PhD

Radiation oncologist
Iridium Kankernetwerk
University of Antwerp
Antwerp, Belgium

