



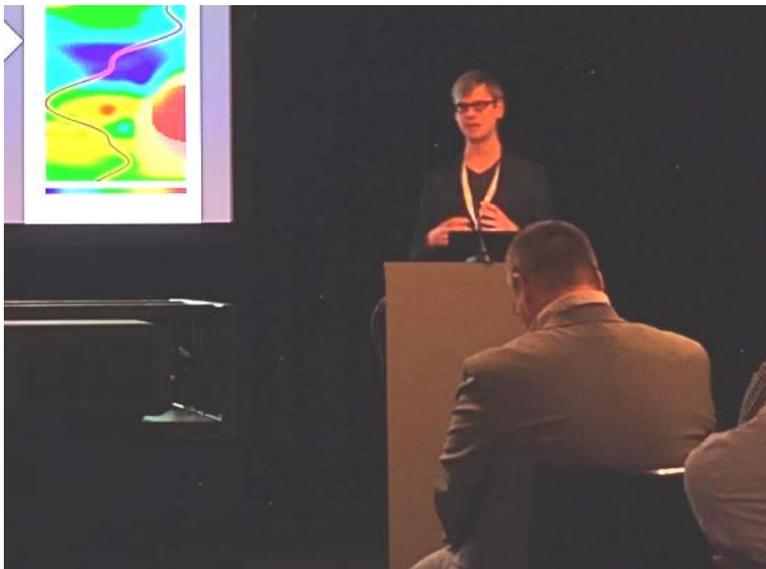
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ESTRO 2022: ESTRO is back (onsite)

When Professor Ben Slotman, president of the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO), addressed the audience at the ESTRO 2022 opening ceremony, my feeling that “this conference is huge!” was confirmed: more than 5000 participants had registered, 90% of them to participate onsite. After the COVID-19 imposed hiatus, ESTRO was back. The feeling, the vision, the scale!

The Netherlands was again the top country in terms of registrations, physics represented an ever-growing share of the conference and all the major vendors sent delegations. This year, ESTRO was big enough to fill most of the Bella Center, Copenhagen’s major conference and trade fair centre. Denmark had abolished all mask and social-distancing requirements in February 2022, so sessions and the exhibition felt like they had in pre-COVID-19 days. Being onsite gave me (and everyone I guess) the opportunity to ask questions during sessions, and, most importantly, to socialise and reconnect with people I had not seen in years. Being able to connect over a coffee or to approach speakers directly after sessions led to the formation of several new contacts. Interaction in person just cannot be replaced, even though online conference platforms have made huge progress over the last few years. Perhaps those systems aren’t quite there yet in terms of informal interaction, or this is a boundary that online participation will never overcome. This feeling was reflected in the small (10%) share of participants who registered for online participation.

However, the hybrid conference style has added benefits for onsite members too. All the sessions are available after the conference, and I have already taken advantage of that: taking screenshots, listening to talks I could not attend. I couldn’t download my own talk to save it in my archive, but apart from that, the online ESTRO experience was quite streamlined and helpful.



Giving my «mini-oral» presentation on dynamic trajectory radiotherapy

Unfortunately this year I could not experience the ESTRO party or industry evening receptions. For me, attending ESTRO meant shipping a family of four, including a three-month-old, to Copenhagen to stay in an Airbnb. Although Copenhagen is known to be quite an expensive city, things worked out thanks to solid public transportation. Mind you, however good the transport, it is quite an experience to spend 10-12 hours a day at a conference and return home to be handed a vomiting toddler. Huge respect and thanks must go to my wife, who handled two toddlers all day so that I could give my humble little talk. Interestingly, I met several well-known and unknown colleagues at ESTRO who had brought their families to the conference. Whether this is new or not, I don’t know. I am convinced, however, that it’s the way to go. A friend of mine had brought her six-month-old boy and, with the help of her husband, managed to keep him safe and happy over the five stressful conference days. Denmark is a welcoming environment for this kind of adventure, and the ESTRO schedule and venue permitted those of us who had families with us to juggle the two sides of our lives.

Content-wise, ESTRO to me has been – and probably will remain – a conference of current hot topics. This year, according to my physics-biased eyes, these hot topics were adaptive treatments, automation, machine learning, and of course FLASH radiotherapy. Clinical sessions were diverse, as several new trial results were reported over a plethora of entities. One of the strong points of ESTRO, in my opinion, is the close relationship it fosters between my main areas of interest – clinical radiation oncology and medical physics. The combination of both fields into one conference enabled the organisation of really interdisciplinary sessions and talks that provided me with always holistic, sometimes even opposite, views on the topic. I had a tough time choosing sessions though, as many of these ran in parallel.

Overall, I was really happy with the setting and content of ESTRO this year. Being back in the same room as more than 4500 other people (plus online attendees) brought back the “conference experience” we have all been missing for the last three years. I will keep this one in very fond memory.



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