



YOUNG

My first time as chair: a young, female Muslim's perspective

During a warm, sunny weekend in May, radiation therapists (RTTs), medical physicists, radiation oncologists and many more from across the world were welcomed to the 2022 meeting of the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology, which was hosted in Copenhagen, Denmark. The weather reflected the warmth of the event. It was a privilege and incredible opportunity to be invited to attend ESTRO this year and to chair a session on adaptive radiotherapy. As an RTT, with five years of experience in the profession, I was daunted at first. The perception regarding such large conferences is that only the elite of radiotherapy, those who are the most intelligent and experienced of us all, can enter. It was a pleasant surprise to see that it is not a closed Society at all and that such a wide variety of individuals and professionals attend. ESTRO proved to be a welcoming place for all. Also, it was clear, from the friendly conversations and interactions that I experienced and heard, that the radiotherapy profession is full to the brim with passionate, motivated, and intelligent individuals. I felt privileged to stand amongst them.

As an individual who belongs to multiple under-represented groups, the experience of chairing can seem even more daunting than perhaps it does for others. As a young person in the profession, it can often feel as if you are not experienced enough; however, this thought was dismissed by my visit to the young track at ESTRO for the first time. It was so reassuring to see a platform that promoted the development of young individuals in the profession – note that young doesn't need to mean age, it's about how young you are in the career! I instantly felt a sense of calm, because there were many others, like me, striving for development both personally and professionally, and navigating all the challenges that came with this.

As a female in the profession, I have had the opportunity to work with many inspirational women. Many women represent the female minority in radiotherapy and are paving the way for the rest of us. I have always felt empowered by them. Their dedication to the profession and their achievements are an inspiration, which made me feel confident that I would achieve my own professional goals and confident to chair a session at the congress. Having the opportunity to meet these women at a platform such as ESTRO added to the already positive experience of attending in the first place.

As I am a Muslim woman and, more specifically, one who wears a hijab, there are challenges of being subject to discrimination, both personally and professionally. Working in a diverse centre in London, I am surrounded by many others just like me; however, attending ESTRO, knowing that there would be many people attending from around the world, I was very much aware that I would be in a minority at the congress. This came with its own anxieties; however, they were pleasantly overcome by the warm welcome and greetings from all members who attended, and it was also very much a pleasure to see a few other women like me in attendance. It was a privilege to represent my community and background. I hope I can attend future congresses and continue to represent my background and I hope that others will be motivated and reassured by this piece to know that ESTRO is not a place of discrimination, but a platform for all to present their work and findings, to network and collaborate with others, and to boost and empower all in the profession, regardless of social or ethnic background.

With all the above tackled, the next challenge was to chair a session successfully. I was relieved to be chairing a session on adaptive radiotherapy, a pertinent topic currently in radiotherapy and a topic with which I am familiar. I had a good understanding of the subject matter and was able to stimulate the discussion with questions of my own. Overall, chairing my first-ever session was a great privilege and learning opportunity for me, as was being able to attend ESTRO for the first time. I must show appreciation to my fellow chair Wim Vingerhoed from Belgium, who made me feel very comfortable. This was the first time either of us had chaired a session, and we worked together to organise the session and ensure that it all ran smoothly.

Overall ESTRO was nothing but an enjoyable experience. I learnt so much from so many others in the profession and met some truly lovely people. I hope to get the opportunity to visit again. Until then I would like to express my gratitude to the ESTRO committee members, organisers, presenters, chairs and attendees.



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