



The pilot ESTRO mentoring programme has officially started

On Saturday 28 August, in the late afternoon at the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology's 2021 conference (ESTRO 2021) in Madrid, a group of 17 people came together for the first time. Ten of them were senior ESTRO members, a mix of radiation oncologists, physicists, radiotherapists (RTTs) and biologists from all over Europe. They were not bound by a membership of a common committee or taskforce, nor by country, nor by any common research, professional or personal interest. The common denominator that brought them to this room was the altruistic wish to help young ESTRO (yESTRO) members, previously unknown to them, to advance their careers.

This meeting was the onsite speed-dating session of the pilot ESTRO mentoring programme. Seven yESTRO mentees were to speed-date with four senior members to find a mentor.

Two years earlier, the seed of the programme had been planted by the yESTRO committee, recalls yESTRO committee member Jolien Heukelom, who, together with Steven Petit, initiated the pilot. Jolien explains: *"We recognized that, though the value of mentoring for professional development is irrefutable, the majority of young ESTRO members do not have access to mentoring programmes in their home institutions or beyond."*

Since supporting professional development fits well into the mission of ESTRO, the pilot was approved. The programme was developed by the yESTRO committee, with the support of the Educational Council and the ESTRO office. An open call was launched and 37 applications from enthusiastic members were received. Fifteen members were admitted to the pilot; they comprised 10 clinicians, three physicists and two RTTs from all over Europe. The group was balanced in gender. The request for mentors was promoted by the different committees and 18 senior members signed up for the programme.

After a delay of 18 months due to COVID-19, the mentoring programme has now officially started, with the speed-dating session as its first event. Like ESTRO 2021, the kick-off took place in hybrid form. For the mentees and mentors who were not able to travel to Madrid, the session was held online.

One of the mentors, Anthony Chalmers (chair of clinical oncology at the Institute of Cancer Sciences, University of Glasgow, UK), shared his experience of the speed-dating: *"It was inspiring to meet early career researchers from different parts of Europe and hear about their aspirations and experiences. I'm delighted to have been allocated a very gifted mentee and look forward to helping him achieve his goals."*

Mentee Nienke Hoekstra said: *"The mentors were very diverse regarding background and approach to mentoring and all were very nice and helpful. After the speed-dating, I wished I could select them all as my mentor."*

Over a span of one year, the mentors will guide the mentees in their quests for personal and professional development. At different time points, evaluation questionnaires will be sent to assess how the programme is valued by mentees and mentors alike. If the pilot is successful, the programme will be embedded permanently within the portfolio of ESTRO activities.



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