Interview with Dr Agata Rembielak, course director

Why did the ESTRO School decide to set up a course on this cancer?
Skin cancer is one of the most common cancers in the world. The term non-melanoma distinguishes it from the less common skin neoplasm called malignant melanoma. Recently there has been an alarming increase in skin cancer incidence worldwide with the World Health Organization estimating two to three million new cases per year. Unfortunately, non-melanoma skin cancer (NMSC) is often not routinely reported to cancer registers, hence the data could be significantly underestimated. The incidence rates also appear to be increasing in rare skin cancers such as Merkel cell carcinoma. Although mortality from NMSC is generally low, treatment of NMSC is becoming a considerable burden for healthcare services across the world due to the number of new cases, ageing populations and also the increased complexity of cases, which often require a specialist multidisciplinary approach. It is also recognised that skin cancer care usually remains a single specialist domain, which could be a dermatologist, plastic surgeon or radiation oncologist, often depending upon local expertise, and that there is a definite need for multidisciplinary approaches with patients being given a choice of treatment options, when clinically indicated.

By setting up this course the ESTRO School has aimed to raise awareness of NMSC and available treatment options, and also to highlight the need for improved multidisciplinary collaboration and research in the field.

What is the usual treatment for this type of cancer? Have methods improved over the years?
Surgery is widely recognised as the mainstay treatment in NMSC. Over the past years major progress has been made in surgical techniques, significantly reducing the limits of operability and improving cosmetic outcomes. The rising incidence in NMSC, particularly in the elderly and frail population, has led to renewed interest in other available options, such as topical treatment, cryotherapy, curettage, photodynamic treatment and electrochemotherapy. Skin radiotherapy and brachytherapy are already well-established treatments in NMSC and recently their use has been on the rise. Significant progress has also been made in non-surgical techniques, with the most recently emerging being electronic brachytherapy. The variety of available treatment options can make the decision on skin cancer treatment very challenging, both for the patients and healthcare professionals. In many cases this decision is made depending upon which skin cancer specialist is involved in the patient’s care. We recognise that there is a scope for multidisciplinary involvement, particularly in complex NMSC patients.
**What will be the main learning outcomes of the course?**
We have set up quite a few learning outcomes for this course, which are listed in the course description. We hope that by the end of the course participants should be able to improve their clinical daily work and provide patients with the best possible treatment due to increased awareness of best practice in NMSC management. That includes adoption of in-depth knowledge and understanding relevant issues in the field of dermatopathology, imaging, invasive and non-invasive treatment, but also best supportive care, which has a vital role not only in a palliative setting. All these issues will be discussed during the course. Also, we would like participants to appreciate the benefits of a multimodality approach to skin cancer patients and relevant clinical services, and encourage multidisciplinary collaboration.

**How did you select the teachers?**
I must admit that the selection process has been quite challenging, mainly due to the ESTRO cap on the total number of faculty members. With such a wide range of topics to cover we needed to approach teachers who were not only experts in their specialties, but also across specialty boundaries. Professor Kovács’ and Professor Eriksen’s inputs at this stage have been invaluable. I am happy to say that every faculty member on our course is a recognised expert in at least two, if not more, relevant areas. Not to mention that all the teachers are very enthusiastic and also great educators. I could not have dreamt of a better team to work with.

**What is the learning concept of the course?**
To accommodate various backgrounds and levels of expertise of the course participants, we have agreed on a dual concept for the course, mixing traditional teaching with active learning. For participants who would like to gain more in-depth knowledge in plastic and Mohs surgery and/or radiotherapy techniques and radiobiology, we have offered optional ‘Meet the expert’ workshops on the mornings of the second and third day of the course. We hope the workshops provide a unique opportunity to learn in a less formal environment from leaders in the field and accommodate more tailored learning needs.

**Who should attend?**
Reflecting its multidisciplinary approach, this course is aimed at all healthcare professionals and relevant trainees who have a special interest in NMSC and would like to improve their knowledge.

**Biography**
Dr Agata Rembielak graduated from medicine and medical physics in Poland. She then enrolled in specialist training in radiation oncology and clinical research fellowships, which she undertook in Poland, Australia, Canada and UK. She holds PhD (Silesian Medical University, Poland) and MD (Manchester University, UK), both in medical sciences and oncology.
Whilst working in the Centre of Oncology at the Institute in Gliwice, Poland, she was involved in the first in Poland clinical implementation of intensity-modulated radiation therapy (IMRT) in a patient and the first real-time high dose rate (HDR) brachytherapy in prostate cancer; she was also involved in the world first application of HDR brachytherapy in the renal artery to prevent restenosis. A new position, to develop the first fully networked Christie Satellite Radiotherapy Centre, tempted her to The Christie Hospital, Manchester, UK, where she currently works as a consultant in clinical oncology.

Her research interests include non-melanoma skin cancer, particularly the role of radiotherapy and brachytherapy in skin cancer management, palliative radiotherapy and geriatric oncology. Within ESTRO she sits on a writing committee on skin brachytherapy guidelines and has recently joined the Groupe Européen de Curiethérapie (GEC)-ESTRO Head and Neck Working Group. She is a member of the skin cancer group at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI), UK, and is currently the clinical investigator in the NCRI clinical trial involving postoperative radiotherapy in high risk cutaneous squamous cell carcinoma (SCC). She collaborates very closely with the Royal College of Radiologists (RCR), BAD (British Association of Dermatologists), NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) and Macmillan Cancer Support in the area of skin cancer and palliative and supportive management in cancer patients. Her research and clinical activity has led to a number of papers in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

Dr Rembielak has been also a keen medical educator, holding a Postgraduate Certificate in Medical Education, and currently studying towards an MA in Medical Education at Edge Hill University, Ormskirk UK. She has been recognised internationally and has been an invited speaker at many national and international conferences and workshops.

Other appointments include section editor for skin cancer in the Journal of Contemporary Brachytherapy and reviewer for Radiotherapy & Oncology.

In her free time, she loves travelling, using lots of sunscreen when visiting countries with a high UV index.