The ESTRO ‘Advanced treatment planning’ course was set in the picturesque Corpus Christi College in Cambridge, UK. This prestigious college, founded in 1352, was the ideal location for the five-day course. I had travelled from Melbourne, Australia, full of enthusiasm and high expectations for what was to come. I was not disappointed.

The course had interactive lectures for the first half of each day, followed in the afternoon with an addictively complex planning challenge, using the treatment planning software (TPS) of choice. This was an excellent balance of theory and practice. The teaching staff were all experts in the field of radiation therapy from across Europe, including Gert Meijer, Neil Burnet, Desiree van den Bongard, Nicola Dinapoli, Ursula Nestlé, Marcus Stock and Marcel van Herk. Each teacher brought unique insights, evidence and experience into the presentations, and there was variety from each of their professional viewpoints, taking in physics, dosimetric, and clinical. The lecturers were interactive, posing questions to the delegates challenging us to interrogate our own practice and techniques. It was very inspiring to learn about the different approaches of centres across the world.

We were eased into the course on day one with introductions to the teaching staff and lectures on planning basics, simple to complex 3D planning, applying International Commission on Radiation Units and Measurements (ICRU), dose calculation algorithms and their differences in clinical impact and planning aspects of breast irradiations. The subsequent days delved into complex treatment techniques such as intensity-modulated radiation therapy (IMRT) and volumetric modulated arc therapy (VMAT), current imaging modalities, probabilistic planning, and proton planning to name a few. In the afternoon we undertook the planning challenges; the sites were breast with supraclavicular lymph nodes, prostate, lung, and head and neck, each site coming with its own set of unique challenges. We worked in groups of two attempting to meet the target and organ and risk dose constraints. Working with practitioners from other departments was a wonderful way to collaborate. This partnership enabled us to all understand and utilise different planning techniques and alternative treatment practices, as well as learning the tips and tricks of the software itself. It was very enjoyable playing with the various functions of the planning systems, or trying different treatment techniques, without the pressure of a clinical environment.

The next morning began with a discussion of the results. We viewed various plans chosen from the different TPS systems and compared the results. It was fantastic to see the diverse techniques and strategies for completing the planning challenge. My teammate and I were chosen to present our lung VMAT plan and were lucky enough to win, which was a real honour.

The social aspect of the course was an expertly guided walking tour of Cambridge University followed by dinner in a Harry Potter-style dining room. It was a perfect way to meet and network with the other delegates and teaching staff, and to create professional relationships from across the world.

I would highly recommend this course to any practitioner in the field of radiation therapy wishing to improve their skills and understanding of advanced treatment planning techniques. This course presents different strategies for complex radiotherapy planning. In addition, you gain a deeper understanding of the physics and biology underpinning treatment planning techniques and systems. The knowledge, skills and competencies you will acquire will help you to deliver high-quality treatment and care to your cancer patients.

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