



BRACHYTHERAPY

Reflections on my years as chair of the GEC-ESTRO brachytherapy committee

Interview with Ina Schulz-Jurgenliemk

Question: *Can you please discuss your achievements and challenges during the time you have chaired the Groupe Européen de Curiethérapie-European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (GEC-ESTRO) committee?*

Amazingly, more than four years have passed since I started my term as chair-elect of GEC-ESTRO. I spent two years learning in detail about GEC-ESTRO and ESTRO ways and preparing myself for the two years of actual GEC-ESTRO chairmanship. Directly after the elections, I was asked whether I expected any challenges to face GEC-ESTRO in the coming years and my answer was "I see quite a lot!" At that moment, the ones I had in mind were all related to brachytherapy. I was also asked where I would focus my efforts as chair of GEC-ESTRO and I answered: "I will experience the most urgent problems when my period as chair begins". At that moment I thought of brachy educational topics, the fluctuating utilisation of brachytherapy, promotion of clinical trials that involved brachytherapy-related questions, improving on guidelines and more of the same.

However, when, two years later, in April 2020, my term as chair started, COVID-19 had arrived and things became much less predictable. The development of the pandemic had quite an impact on the regular and established GEC-ESTRO activities, which we are all fond of and expect to happen regularly: live committee meetings in Brussels, a live ESTRO annual meeting including a brachy track, a live GEC-ESTRO workshop at the end of the year. Not to forget the World Congress of Brachytherapy (WCB), which was planned to be a joint live meeting with ESTRO 2020 in Vienna. During 2020 and a big part of 2021, the first priority for myself and the entire GEC-ESTRO committee was COVID-19 damage control. The WCB was the highest priority for us. Eventually we were quite happy with the online event in 2021. However, while replanning and reorganising this congress, we were also busy reorganising the other planned meetings and activities. I am very grateful for the support of the entire GEC-ESTRO committee in these quite chaotic times, for the never-ending support of the ESTRO office and the willingness to take risks with us, and for the willingness of the GEC-ESTRO community to accept and embrace our alternatives. It was quite a tough time, but we also learned a lot while we adapted to the new reality. Together, we managed to stay productive in the last two years and we now realise that the new ways also offer chances for improvement. We have more awareness regarding the avoidance of unnecessary travel. Online meetings can be realised easily and can be held more frequently than before, if necessary. We can reach a broader audience through online or blended events. We should keep these options.

I would like to mention a few things on which we have focused in the last two years:

- We realised an extension of the memorandum of understanding with the American Brachytherapy Society. Now this includes an agreement to cooperate in the planning of the WCB and agreements regarding joint guideline writing.
- We have introduced specific GEC-ESTRO guidelines for guideline writing and publication.
- BrachyHERO has experienced a boost and we have installed a task force for brachy education.
- A new working group for paediatric brachytherapy is in the making.
- We have tightened our bonds with other committees in ESTRO in order to improve collaboration.
- ESTRO is working on a new governance structure in which the standing committees, including GEC-ESTRO, will be well placed for the future.

Brachytherapy has an important role in the treatment of several tumour sites. Numerous past and present efforts have provided the clinical proof of the principle. However, utilisation of brachytherapy and education in the subject vary across Europe. The BrachyHERO group and the educational task force are currently addressing these challenges. Our goal is to achieve a solid distribution of brachytherapy facilities throughout Europe and to improve on the availability of multi-professional brachytherapy teams. There was enough left for me to do during the last two years of my chairmanship!

The past two years have been incredible. I learned an awful lot and I, therefore, want to say thank you:

- to GEC-ESTRO co-chairs and all committee members for their support, motivation, patience, advice, good ideas.....;
- to GEC-ESTRO secretary Marisol de Brabandere for doing an incredible job;
- to the ESTRO office, especially Evelyn, Agostino, Alessandro and Jess, for their kind support and collaboration;
- to the GEC-ESTRO community for staying with us and becoming even more active;
- to our industry partners for financial support in difficult times;
- to other ESTRO bodies for their cooperation and interest in joint activities; and
- to international brachytherapy societies for proceeding with joint efforts.

Right now, I am very much looking forward to a good summer break, as I hope you all are. I wish you a good time with whatever activities you are planning for the coming weeks!

But I am also looking forward to meeting many of you at the next GEC-ESTRO workshop, which will be hosted this year in Nice, France, from 1st to 2nd December. The provisional programme is accessible on the ESTRO website and registration is open. Keep your fingers crossed that a live event can occur!



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