



CONFERENCES

Honorary Member Award 2023

Awardee Interview



Thomas E. Merchant

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What have been the highlights of your career?

The main highlights have been leading the development of the world's first proton therapy centre dedicated solely to the treatment of children. We introduced adjuvant radiotherapy successfully as a frontline treatment for children under three years old who have ependymoma.

What is your next challenge?

To analyse and report the results from the current generation of clinical trials that involved children with brain tumours.

To contribute to global paediatric medicine by increasing the quality and capacity in the area of paediatric radiotherapy.

What do you think are the next challenges for radiation oncologists?

To develop clinical and molecular risk stratification treatment guidelines for patients with all types of tumours through the performance of well-designed clinical trials.

What does this award mean to you?

The award is an honour and recognition of my contribution to paediatric radiation oncology and the direct or indirect role that I have played in the design of clinical trials and treatment guidelines for children with brain tumours.

To whom would you like to dedicate your award?

My award is dedicated to the late Peter W. de Graaf, a surgical oncologist who practised for many years in Amsterdam, Utrecht and Delft in The Netherlands. He was an outstanding mentor and friend.

What has been your involvement within ESTRO?

I have supported the research and treatment efforts of the paediatric radiation oncologists in ESTRO.

What started your interest in science?

I attended public schools in a community with a major university (East Lansing, Michigan). The schools and teachers were excellent and supported the curiosity of students who were interested in knowledge and discovery beyond the required curriculum.

Did your parents encourage you in your career, or would they rather you had done something else?

My friends and family encouraged me to follow my interests, which led to 15 years of post-secondary education and training.

What are you proudest of in your career?

I am proud of the care that I have provided to hundreds of children and their families during the past 30 years and the opportunity to lead practice-changing clinical trials through the support of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and cooperative groups in paediatric oncology.

If you hadn't been a scientist, what would you like to have been?

I would have worked in the field of engineering. I have a bachelor's degree in nuclear engineering.

What do you do in your spare time?

I enjoy walking with my wife and daughters at home in Memphis, Tennessee or on vacation in faraway places. I also enjoy hunting and spending time outdoors when time allows.

When do you think you will retire, and what would you like to do then?

I have no plans for retirement and I hope to practise for many years to come. When I do retire, I hope to work alongside my wife to support our daughters.

