



YOUNG

Interview with a department head-Professor Andrea Filippi

What is your current position?

I am professor of radiation oncology at the University of Pavia and chair of the Radiation Oncology Department at Fondazione IRCCS Policlinico San Matteo, Pavia, Italy.

What was your previous position?

I was an assistant professor in radiation oncology at the University of Torino, Italy.

How did you know that you were ready for such a step-up?

After spending many years in the team led by Umberto Ricardi at the University of Torino, I had two years' experience as vice-chair in a small radiotherapy unit within a larger radiology department in another hospital of the Torino area. There I started to learn how to deal with organisational issues and not only with clinical problems. I also developed projects and ideas for the future, hoping to have the chance to lead a more extensive department (and this happened at the end of 2017).

Did your previous supervisor/boss encourage you to apply and/or help you prepare to apply?

It was quite a long process: we both knew about two to three years before the chance occurred that it was time for me to be more independent and possibly apply for a new position, but we also had a very long history of collaboration and friendship, and it was not easy at the beginning to break the professional and personal links we had. But finally we were both convinced and he did support my application for the new position.

How does the recruitment process work for your current position? How long did it take from when you found out about the call to the first day in your new position?

It took about four to five months. First, we met for an informal conversation about the future of the new department and the possible projects. Afterwards, there was a formal selection procedure, and I won the position (out of seven candidates).

What was the biggest change with respect to your previous position? What are your new responsibilities (besides clinical/academic work)?

It was quite a shock: the responsibility of medical staff, and the need to plan the development of my unit, both in terms of new technology and new collaborators. Moreover, I was not prepared to be involved directly in budget issues, and I did not know how to deal with many new problems. I hope I am now able to do that (although I am not sure about it!). I learned with practice, and I also attended a course for medical directors.

What is the biggest challenge in your new role?

The challenge is to think about the future: what are the choices in terms of new machines? For how many patients, and focusing on which pathology? How do you build a network with surgeons, medical oncologists, and haematologists in a hospital where you are not known? How to start research programmes that may take several years to be completed? How to choose the best

collaborators? (Most importantly, how to convince the hospital/university management that you need more collaborators, and that they must be highly qualified?)

If you had been asked five years ago “where do you see yourself in five years”, would your current role have been the answer?

Yes, in terms of academic and clinical position; probably I was not thinking of living 200km away from my family, and this is the main logistical problem. Still, my wife fully supported my choice, and even though with some difficulties, we are finding a balance...

What about in five years? Where do you see yourself then?

Interesting question...I want to build an excellent team here, and I would possibly leave only once I had the sensation that this goal was achieved. If someone would offer me a new position, it would largely depend on the quality of my work here in Pavia, so let's work, and we will see...

Any advice for young professionals hoping to work in a role similar to yours in the future?

I do not see myself as a "guru" or a "magister," and for sure, I am not! I only would like to say that it is quite true that if you have ambition and courage, and a bit of luck, most of the time you will reach what you like.

What kind of department head/team leader are you?

I don't know, you had better ask my colleagues...I picture myself as a person who appreciates talking to people, trying to listen to critics, suggestions, and different points of view, but actually, I don't know if that is true or not!

Which person(s) have played an important role in your career on the way of becoming a department head/team leader?

Many people: Umberto Ricardi at the University of Torino, Roberto Orecchia from the European Institute of Oncology in Milan, Stefano Magrini from Brescia University and several other colleagues and friends from Italy and abroad (I met some of them through the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO); I have been a member since 2002). They taught me a lot and their example as physicians and researchers was, and still is, crucial for my career. And my family, especially my daughters, who keep me smiling even in the most challenging situations!



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