



SCHOOL

'Foundations of Leadership in Radiation Oncology' Course

26 April, Milan, Italy

Radiation oncology, of necessity, requires inter-professional collaboration to ensure seamless patient care. Given this, many of us are taking on a leadership role, which requires a unique skill set that is usually not included in our professional curricula. I have recently taken on numerous formal and informal leadership roles which I felt under-equipped to manage effectively. Thus the 'Foundations of Leadership in Radiation Oncology' training, which was offered as a course prior to the meeting of the European Society of Radiotherapy and Oncology (ESTRO38) in Milan, Italy, piqued my interest.

A total of 37 radiation oncology professionals from 22 countries participated, including physicists, radiation therapists and clinical/radiation oncologists. The teaching faculty included ESTRO members from the European Union, Canada and Australia. The course involved a Skype lecture a few weeks in advance of ESTRO, preparatory reading, and one full day of seminars on the day prior to, and two lunch-time sessions during, the ESTRO general meeting. The pre-meeting reading material was a well-curated collection of YouTube videos, TED talks, articles and interactive modules relevant to leadership in medicine. The on-site course was a mixture of lectures, small-group discussions and activities. The varied learning formats enabled improved understanding of the course material, collaboration between professional attendees, and movement around the room.

I found the discussion around leadership/personality typing to be exceptionally helpful. It helped me to reflect on how my personality and leadership style affects my communication, values and preferred methods of interaction with others. It provided many 'aha!' moments when I realised why I was comfortable conversing and working with some people while other interactions tended to be combative. This information alone has been transformative in my workplace environment, as I now have an approach to managing conflict and communicating effectively with colleagues whom I had previously found challenging to work with.

As someone who feels inundated by endless meetings and committee responsibilities, the teaching around how to run effective meetings was particularly useful. It provided practical knowledge and skills for building an agenda, staying on task and ensuring that only the necessary stakeholders attended meetings. I also appreciated the discussion around the fact that having many diverse points of view, skill sets and modes of thinking is a positive attribute within teams. To demonstrate this, each person presented a quality-improvement initiative to two fellow participants who provided feedback. It was interesting to hear their comments on my proposal, as many of their suggestions were things I had not thought of.

The last task was to create a pitch for a magnetic resonance linear accelerator (MR-linac) that could travel to remote communities. Each group had to pitch their mission, vision, strategy, and plan for implementation either to patients, families and the community, to other healthcare providers or to leadership/government. With 20 minutes to prepare, it was inspiring to see the results and creativity of my fellow course-mates. This hands-on final task of the course was a great way to foster inter-professional collaboration and put our new leadership and collaborative skills to the test.

I entered this course feeling that I was floundering in my leadership roles, but exited with clear methods to approach communication and team work, and to lead change. The course has already had a dramatic impact on my practice, which is now better managed with shorter meetings, improved inter-professional collaboration and success in implementing a streamlined process for stereotactic brain radiotherapy in my department. I also left the course feeling inspired by my colleagues, with whom I hope to keep in contact.



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