

Radiation Therapy (RT) is indicated in the treatment of 50 per cent of cancer patients. Professionals gather in Quebec City to share latest methods to improve the patient’s RT experience.

Quebec City – September 25, 2009. Canada’s leaders in the radiation therapy field, along with experts in pain and symptom management, and palliative care, will attend the 23rd Annual Scientific Meeting of the Canadian Association of Radiation Oncology (CARO-ACRO) from September 30 to October 3, 2009 at the Hilton Hotel in Quebec City. The theme for this year is: *Improving the Patient Experience: Symptom Control and Beyond.*

“More than 50 per cent of all patients who receive a cancer diagnosis could benefit from radiation therapy, which alone, can cure some cancers, destroy or shrink some cancer tumours, or interfere with cancer cell reproduction,” states Dr. Michael Milosevic, CARO-ACRO president. “Plus,” he adds, “this remarkably safe, effective treatment is also used to relieve cancer patients’ pain resulting from the spread of cancer into their bones; to stem bleeding at tumour sites in the body; and to alleviate blockages that interfere with patients’ breathing or swallowing.”

One of three, core cancer treatments

“It is critical that newly diagnosed cancer patients are advised about all the options available to them for treatment of their particular type of cancer,” explains Dr. Milosevic. “Radiation therapy is one of three, core cancer treatments along with surgery and chemotherapy. Radiation therapy is often used alone to cure cancer or alleviate symptoms, or in combination with these other treatments, whichever approach yields the best overall results for our patients.”

Radiation Therapy Myth Buster

“Unfortunately,” he continues, “radiation therapy is the least understood, and perhaps the most mythologized of the three treatments. CARO-ACRO is eager to dispel the myths about radiation therapy. To that end, we have produced a *Radiation Therapy Myth Buster* that we are happy to make available immediately to the media, and to any member of the public through our CARO-ACRO web site. The Myth Buster defines radiation therapy and addresses key public misconceptions about this treatment modality. We are continually seeking ways to make the very best use of existing and new technologies, and to improve our patients’ experiences during and after treatment.”

Approximately 500 radiation oncologists, radiation therapists and technicians, medical physicists, radiobiologists, pain and symptom management, and palliative care specialists

will share the latest research breakthroughs and developments in patient care during the meeting. The association has prepared a keynote and featured presenter list that is available for media review in the event that you wish to interview some of our very talented, committed specialists from across Canada, and around the world.

The objectives for the four-day meeting are to:

- Re-examine the patient experience from cure to palliation, defining issues surrounding cancer survivorship and patient satisfaction
- Appraise the potential role of aggressive radiation therapy in the non-curative setting, including re-irradiation and the adaptation of precision therapy for relapsing cancer
- Review the biological and clinical science of managing bone metastases (cancer spread to the bone), updating recent advances in pathophysiologic knowledge, symptom classification and multimodality management.

Continual Improvements

Dr. Matthew Parliament, incoming CARO-ACRO president explains, “Professionals in the radiation therapy field are dedicated to continual improvements in radiation therapy that allow: shorter treatments - often as little as 15 seconds; more specifically focused and high precision treatments - to avoid affecting healthy, surrounding tissue; and, tightly calculated dose modulation to have the prescribed cancer killing impact using the least amount of power.”

PET-CT & Human Genome Mapping

“With the advent of PET-CT (positron emission tomography - computed tomography) technology,” continues Dr. Parliament, “radiation specialists are able to more clearly see exactly where the cancer is located in the body and what it is doing, which allows us to more accurately plan personalized, targeted treatments. In some cases, where indicated, we can also more quickly evaluate the effectiveness of treatment and readjust elements to be most effective. The mapping of the human genome is also aiding us in planning personalized tumour treatments.”

Methods of RT Delivery

There are two main ways of using radiation therapy (also called radiotherapy) to treat cancer:

- The most common is the external use of high-energy, x-rays, and/or electron beams targeted to a specific area in the body, usually delivered by a large machine while the patient lies on a special bed.
- The second is brachytherapy, which is an internal procedure common for prostate and gynecological cancer patients, which involves the placement of special seeds (radioactive isotopes) into the tumour.

Canada's RT Facilities and Services State-of-the-Art

Canada's radiation treatment facilities are state-of-art, but along with so many other critical and high demand treatments in health care, are often operating at above-maximum capacity. Continual reinvestment in personnel and technology for radiation treatment of cancer patients needs to be a priority in health planning.

Currently there are 320 radiation oncologists and 1,190 radiation therapists practicing at 35 centres across the country. CARO-ACRO has a total membership of 687 members from a variety of specialties within the field: radiation oncologists (physicians with specialized training in the care of patients with cancer and the use of radiation treatment), physicists, therapists, radiobiologists, fellows and residents.

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We encourage the media to take advantage of this gathering of Canada's top professionals in the radiation therapy field. We will be happy to: arrange interviews with keynote presenters, provide background information, arrange for media accreditation to attend selected sessions at the meeting, and support the development of editorial stories.

Resources available: Radiation Therapy Myth Buster, CARO-ACRO Backgrounder, Recommended list of keynote and highly respected presenters for interview opportunities – all available upon request. CARO Annual Scientific Meeting web site address:
<http://www.caro-acro.ca/>

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