

Why Radiation Oncology?

By Samir P. Desai, M.D.

A MD2B Publication

Copyright © 2012 MD2B
MD2B, PO Box 300988, Houston, TX 77230
info@md2b.net

Notice: This report is designed to provide information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher and authors are not rendering legal or other professional services. The authors and publisher disclaim any personal liability, either directly or indirectly, for advice or information presented within. No responsibility is assumed for errors, inaccuracies, omissions, or any false or misleading implication that may arise due to the text.

Why Radiation Oncology?

20 Radiation Oncologists Offer Reasons Why They Chose to Enter the Specialty

1

I learned about radiation oncology during my 2nd year of medical school at the University of Texas in Galveston. One of my upper classmate mentors was entering the field and recommended that I check it out as a career option. Unfortunately, I learned first-hand about radiation when in the same year my mother-in-law was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor. She required radiation treatments and I spent time in Minnesota helping to care for her. I accompanied her to her radiation appointments, spoke with her radiation oncologist, and watched her get set up for her treatment. I appreciated the time and empathy of the treating physician and was fascinated by the delivery of therapeutic radiation.¹

Caryn Anderson, MD
Assistant Professor of Radiation Oncology
University of Iowa

2

Radiation Oncology is unique because it combines the practice of medicine with cutting edge technology. The combination of hands on patient care and technology appealed to me. There is no other field in medicine where a doctor gets to see their patient 5-6 weeks straight as they undergo therapy. Patients have a lot to offer us as physicians; you see a person in a most vulnerable state (fighting cancer) and it is amazing to see them go through treatment and deal with their situation. This is one of the few fields in medicine where patients really appreciate the time and effort that their doctor spends with them and it's nice. It's gratifying.²

Sharad Goyal, MD
Chief Resident
Department of Radiation Oncology, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

3

Radiation oncology is a specialty that has many facets that keep you wanting to come back to work and engage you in lots of different ways. When lots of people think about radiation oncology, they think it's a terribly technical specialty. It does have technical aspects but there is also a huge clinical component and the combination of those two is very engaging. We are very fortunate to work within a multidisciplinary team with input from different colleagues including medical and surgical oncologists, as well as colleagues in physics, radiation therapy and nursing, and that allows you to work in a collaborative environment which is very enjoyable to be around. Also, we are a very innovative specialty. Radiation oncology has changed dramatically within the last 15-20 years, and we're now able to better treat our patients, reduce the toxicity of treatments, and are very collaborative with the other specialties to deliver combined-modality treatment. These are all very interesting developments and it's a very forward moving specialty.

Dr. Barbara-Ann Miller
Program Director of the Radiation Oncology Residency at the University of Toronto

Why Radiation Oncology?

4

Radiation Oncology is a great specialty because of the breadth of opportunities it affords. It provides an opportunity to interact with patients clinically, but also to do research, patient education, and teaching for undergraduate and postgraduate students. Now is a very exciting time in Radiation Oncology with lots of novel research sparking big changes in the field over the last 10 years.⁴

Dr. Meredith Giuliani

5

"My father had a life-threatening illness," says Dr. Allen. "As a result of his situation, I became interested in medicine and caring for those suffering from illness...Cancer patients make decisions that impact their quality and length of life. It can be overwhelming. We educate them about the disease, explaining options for care and how we can be there to support them."⁵

Dr. Matthew Allen

6

I did research in a cancer biology laboratory while I was in medical school. At the time, my work on angiogenesis of tumor blood vessels sparked my curiosity in the field of cancer biology and I originally chose medical oncology as my specialty.

While I was training at the University of Chicago, I met some brilliant mentors in radiation oncology and decided to train with them as opposed to going into medical oncology.

With radiation oncology, patients get an immediate benefit from treatment and can improve very rapidly. Within the course of a month or two, you are able to see cures of cancers, relief of pain, and improved function of an organ that's damaged by cancer. The positive feedback we get from our patients and their families is very rewarding.⁶

Dr. Dennis Hallahan

Chairman of the Department of Radiation Oncology at Washington University

7

"I decided to go into radiation oncology because I thought it would be rewarding to work with patients facing a life-altering diagnosis such as cancer," explained Dr. Deshmukh. "The specialty also relies on advanced technology and physics, which are two of my areas of interest. However, it's getting to know the patients and their families and helping them during a difficult time that is most rewarding to me."⁷

Dr. Abhijit Desmukh

Why Radiation Oncology?

8

“I always wanted to become a doctor but after seeing my father go through the experience of having cancer and then dying from cancer, when I was a teenager, it led me to Oncology,” says Dr. James Adams. When asked what he finds most rewarding about radiation oncology, he says “curing a terrible disease and comforting those who can’t be cured, as well as comforting the families of those patients.”⁸

Dr. James Adams

9

“Radiation oncology has benefited significantly from recent technological advancements. Now we can conform radiation better to a target tumor by employing intensity modulated radiation therapy. We can target tumors better by employing image guided radiation therapy. In my practice, it has been very rewarding to use these exciting technologies in the care of my patients.”⁹

Dr. Marc Mosbacher

10

Dr. Hartman says that the most rewarding part of his job is discussing the available cancer treatment options when meeting his patients for the first time, and says, “I want to put patients at ease by sitting down together and discussing what we can offer to maximize their outcome.”

“I thoroughly enjoy developing close relationships with my patients, and am significantly involved in their care, since treatment courses range in length from one to eight weeks,” he says. “Plus I’m able to design and plan courses of treatment for patients using some of the most advanced technology available.”¹⁰

Dr. Mark Hartman

11

Dr. Patel specializes in radiation oncology. She firmly believes that comprehensive cancer care is a multidisciplinary team effort. One of the most rewarding and important aspects of her practice is educating patients about their cancer diagnosis and helping them cope with the multitude of emotions that a cancer diagnosis can produce.¹¹

Dr. Meera Patel

Why Radiation Oncology?

12

I first became familiar with oncology because of my father, who has been a radiation oncologist at Little Company of Mary for almost forty years. I always saw how happy he was when he left for work and came home, and this left a strong impression on me. Many fields of oncology would have allowed me the opportunity to work closely with and treat cancer patients. I felt radiation oncology best combined my interests in patient care, oncology, physics, and computers. Radiotherapy is also one of the most dynamic fields in medicine with almost daily advances in treatment techniques and delivery.¹²

Dr. Haider Shirazi

13

As a medical student, I considered becoming a medical oncologist (medical oncologists diagnose and treat cancer patients using drug therapies, not radiation). I was fortunate to have been able to work with a truly wonderful radiation oncologist while I was a resident, and that experience influenced me a great deal. I am most happy with my choice to become a radiation oncologist.

My patients are the reason I do this. They are wonderful people with many needs, both emotional and medical. We strive to meet those needs by giving them excellent, compassionate care and high quality treatments. Even if we don't achieve a cure, I feel we provide emotional and physical comfort to make each patient's path easier.

Dr. Charles Mateskon

14

My specialty has been revolutionized by the advances made in computer technology. These more powerful computers have allowed us to diagnose cancer faster and more accurately, through the use of CT, MRI, and now PET scanning. They have allowed us to do much more accurate radiation therapy treatment planning, which has given us the opportunity to use more individualized treatment fields and higher radiation doses. Hopefully this will result in better outcomes and fewer side effects for patients.¹⁴

Dr. Cassandra Foens

15

When I was going to medical school here, the chair of radiation oncology was Carl Mansfield. When Dr. Mansfield talked to us about radiation oncology, he was so passionate about how you can take photons, protons and neutrons and use them to cure cancer. Since I had a strong physics and engineering background, this was so fascinating, and I knew right then that this was the career for me.¹⁵

Dr. Parvesh Kumar
Chairman of the Radiation Oncology Department at University of Kansas

Why Radiation Oncology?

16

Radiation Oncology is a stimulating specialty with a significant clinical component caring for challenging patients dealing with a serious illness. At the same time there is a definite technical component based on the delivery of ionizing radiation in the treatment of cancer. As well there is an excellent opportunity for both research and teaching.

My choice of radiation oncology as a career was stimulated by my strong interest in cancer as a disease as well as the challenge of caring for patients dealing with a serious illness. At the same time, there is a basis in hard science in the delivery of radiation treatment, which I found appealing.¹⁶

University of Alberta

17

I enjoy the special patient-doctor relationship that grows out of seeing each other every day during treatment for up to eight weeks straight. It is the joint “fight” that we share against a potentially life-threatening disease, one that changes the patient’s whole perspective on how to live and plan day to day, which in turn, opens a very special conversation. And the relationship doesn’t stop at the end of treatment – it continues for many years after that as the patient returns for careful follow-up.

Radiation oncologists are able to help patients through a diagnosis that is very serious, both medically and psychosocially. To be able to cure a patient is so rewarding, but even in the event that is not possible, it is gratifying to be able to help improve their quality of life, to alleviate their pain or their symptoms. I enjoy my work because of the combination of high-touch clinical skills with advanced technology skills in my practice.

Thirty years ago, cancer was the dreaded “C” word that people did not feel comfortable discussing. I found it gratifying to see how radiation therapy could help cancer patients by actually shrinking and curing cancers. Radiation oncology could stop bleeding, coughing, pain and a whole host of other symptoms. I enjoyed the luxury of the amount of time that I could spend with patients and their families as they came in for treatment every day. I enjoyed the very concrete results of seeing a cancer on an X-Ray or CT scan and then targeting and irradiating that tumor, ultimately getting immediate feedback on the response to treatment several weeks later. I liked the fact that even being a specialist, I needed to use knowledge of the entire human body and every organ system in my daily work.¹⁷

Dr. Sara Huang

18

Dr. Madsen first discovered her passion for radiation oncology as a student during her rotation at Stanford’s Department of Radiation Oncology. She was fascinated by the scientific and technologic demands of the field as well as the meaningful way it allowed her to help patients facing cancer.¹⁸

Berit Lyholm Madsen, M.D

Why Radiation Oncology?

19

"Radiation therapy is an extremely satisfying area of medicine," she says. "Our ability to treat patients has improved dramatically because of the technological advances, particularly in computing. We are better able to treat the tumor, while limiting damage to surrounding tissues."¹⁹

Dr. Rena Zimmerman

20

There were a series of events on the path to choosing my specialty. In college, I was interested in Physics and majored in Biophysics because to me, the most interesting application of physics is to human life. In medical school I became interested in cancer and realized that while many diseases are only managed, cancer may be cured.

A family member then developed cancer and part of the treatment was with radiation. The combination of applied physics, technology, and a powerful and effective modality to treat cancer was very attractive.²⁰

Dr. Wade Thorstad

Why Radiation Oncology?

References

- ¹Carryn Anderson, MD. Available at: <http://www.medicine.uiowa.edu/facultyfocus.aspx?id=5473>. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ²Sharad Goyal, MD. Available at: http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/radiation_oncology/documents/NewsLetterV1_3Feb2008.pdf. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ³Dr. Barbara-Ann Miller. Available at: <http://multimed.current-oncology.com/residents/interview-with-dr-barbara-ann-millar/>. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ⁴Dr. Meredith Giuliani. Available at: <http://multimed.current-oncology.com/residents/interview-with-dr-merideth-giuliani/>. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ⁵Dr. Matthew Allen. Available at: <http://www.bradenton.com/2008/10/29/984584/dr-matthew-allen-and-dr-phillip.html>. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ⁶Dr. Dennis Hallahan. Available at: <http://wuphysicians.wustl.edu/page.aspx?pageID=1065>. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ⁷Dr. Abhijit Desmukh. Available at: <http://carethatamazes.com/doctors/deshmukh.html>. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ⁸Dr. James Adams. Available at: <http://www.baptistmedicalgroup.org/doctors/james-adams-md>. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ⁹Dr. Marc Mosbacher. Available at: http://www.ohcare.com/physicians/radiation_oncology/marc_mosbacher/. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ¹⁰Dr. Mark Hartman. Available at: <http://www.rwmc.net/cancer-services-our-doctors>. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ¹¹Dr. Meera Patel. Available at: <http://rockymountaincancercenters.com/rmcc-difference/our-doctors/patel>. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ¹²Dr. Haider Shirazi. Available at: <http://lcmhealthnews.org/featured-physician/featured-physician-get-to-know-dr-shirazi>. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ¹³Dr. Charles Mateskon. Available at: http://www.skyridgemedcenter.com/conditions_we_treat/cancer_care/radiation-oncology/meet-our-radiation-therapy-medical-director.htm. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ¹⁴Dr. Cassandra Foens. Available at: http://www.healthcare.uiowa.edu/alumni/interviews/foens_cassandra.html. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ¹⁵Dr. Parvesh Kumar. Available at: <http://www.kucancercenter.org/careers/our-stories/kumar/>. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ¹⁶University of Alberta. Available at: http://www.med.ualberta.ca/Library/Documents/Education/StudentAffairs/radiation_oncology.pdf. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ¹⁷Dr. Sara Huang. Available at: http://www.stmarysmedicalcenter.org/stellent/groups/public/@xinternet_con_sms/documents/webcontent/213818.pdf. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ¹⁸Berit Lyholm Madsen, M.D. Available at: <http://www.peninsulacancercenter.com/team.html>. Accessed May 18, 2012.
- ¹⁹Dr. Rena Zimmerman. Available at: <http://www.seattlecca.org/networkmembers/renazimmerman.cfm>. Accessed May 19, 2012.
- ²⁰Dr. Wade Thorstad. Available at: <http://wuphysicians.wustl.edu/page.aspx?pageID=166>. Accessed May 18, 2012.