

AbstractID: 14636 Title: Enhancing the Medical Physicist – Patient Relationship

Patients today are increasingly aware of the importance of medical physicists in the safe and effective use of radiation for diagnosis and treatment. As a Medical Specialist practicing in a clinical department the medical physicist's duties include direct interaction with patients and their families, answering questions and providing assurance to the patient that the procedures they are about to undergo will be performed appropriately. However, many currently practicing medical physicists lack the formal training from which their physician colleagues gain skills and confidence for interacting with patients.

In radiation oncology simulation, the physicist-patient consult can occur for many different reasons but usually it involves helping the physician determine the best treatment options for a patient. At the time of simulation, it is important for the physicist to be able to assist the therapist and dosimetrist in understanding and optimally implementing the treatment goals for a given patient, for instance by participating in the design and fabrication of appropriate patient-specific devices to meet these goals. In brachytherapy, the medical physicist can be present in a number of roles; collaborating with physician colleagues during planning and delivery of the implant, performing radiation surveys, and instructing patients on safe practices for the duration of their irradiation.

In diagnostic situations, the medical physicist is often called upon to explain the radiation risks of a specific procedure. This has always involved sensitive issues such as pregnancy and concern for children, and recent newspaper articles about radiation risk have raised more anxiety in the general population.

Physicists also have to be able to educate and counsel individuals who have personal concerns about radiation, radiation exposures, and contamination.

In this session, speakers will discuss the importance of the medical physicist's direct patient interactions in the above situations and will offer some advice regarding how best to present such issues. They will illustrate effective methods for such interactions, including the use of anecdotal cases. The goal of the session is to provide medical physicists with ideas for improving their patient interactions; helping the patient to understand the procedures they are undergoing, and thus enhancing the stature of the medical physicist.