

Thank you all very much indeed for inviting me to attend this, the annual Radiotherapy weekend. I take this opportunity to welcome you all here to Birmingham and hope you all enjoy your time here.

I was lucky enough to attend this event last year and it certainly lived up to all my expectations, so I'm sure you will all have a fantastic weekend where we can not only increase our knowledge by listening to excellent presentations and visiting the exhibitors, but also we can take full advantage of the networking opportunities, renewing old friendships, and making lots of new ones.

I am also privileged to attend this conference in 2011; a landmark year for all of you who work in radiotherapy. It is one hundred years since, in 1911, that remarkable woman Marie Curie won the Nobel Prize, at a time when there were very few women scientists. In that year, she was awarded the Nobel Prize for chemistry, for her work in the isolation of two radioactive elements; radium and polonium. And what makes it even more remarkable is that she had previously won the Nobel Prize in physics, in 1903. A truly remarkable lady. And to this day she is *still* the only woman who has ever achieved the incredible feat of winning two Nobel Prizes, thus making crucial breakthroughs in the most challenging of scientific fields.

Marie Curie carried out her groundbreaking work in the field of radiation and paved the way for the incredible service that you are all able to offer to people with the diagnosis of cancer today. As a scientific pioneer, she paid the ultimate sacrifice for her brave quest to understand the properties of radium and the therapeutic benefits it could bring. As radium was such an unfamiliar element at that time, and because its potential dangers as well as its benefits were not fully understood, Marie Curie became ill from radiation exposure, and she eventually died from leukaemia in 1934, undoubtedly as a result of her lifetime's work.

Research and development has continued over the intervening one hundred years, and we now have the ability to provide sophisticated ways of treatment planning and treatment delivery. But a lack of commitment from successive governments and a lack of investment in the service can sometimes make this challenging.

You all are a highly trained and educated workforce, who continue to develop and learn. Ongoing research maintains the exploration of new techniques for treatment and the improvement of radiotherapy services for the benefit of patients, in order to improve cancer outcome survival rates. Sophisticated computer equipment, capable of enabling precise beam focusing, thus minimising doses to normal tissue, enables techniques such as IMRT and stereotactic radiotherapy to improve the patient experience, minimise side effects and contribute to longer term survival for patients.

So you're probably wondering 'why is she telling me all this?', because I am sure, as therapy radiographers, you know all this. This is your area of expertise, one that you all know very well and have pride in. But you also know, as well as I do, that radiotherapy can often be the unsung hero within the range of treatments available for people with a diagnosis of cancer.

The results of the survey commissioned by Cancer Research UK are released today and the findings demonstrate just how big that gap is between the public perception and awareness of radiotherapy and the great benefits that it can offer. Two thousand adults across the UK were asked to choose words that they associate with various forms of cancer treatment. The results were not completely surprising and demonstrate the

challenges the radiotherapy community face. Some of the main findings are this:

- Fewer than one in ten people associate the word 'modern' with radiotherapy, compared to almost half who thought modern described targeted cancer drugs.
- Almost half the participants associate the word 'gruelling' with radiotherapy, compared to only one in ten who associate that word with targeted cancer drugs.
- Forty per cent chose the word 'frightening' to describe radiotherapy, compared to just sixteen per cent for targeted cancer drugs.
- And only fifteen per cent of respondents think radiotherapy is precise, compared to a quarter of people who think targeted cancer drugs are.

So we really must ask ourselves today, one hundred years on from Marie Curie's historic award, why do these public perceptions of radiotherapy exist? Why do the general public know so little about radiotherapy? It may be, in part, due to the association with Marie Curie's pioneering work with radiotherapy and the nature of her death that has left many people fearful of radiotherapy as a form of treatment. Even today.

Or it could be that the location of many radiotherapy departments and cancer services in our hospitals are away from the main thoroughfares, which means that for many people it is a case of out of sight, out of mind. Even within your own NHS trusts and health boards, you may sometimes be a little isolated and invisible. Or could it simply be we do not have the budget to publicise all the progress which has been made in the radiotherapy treatments you deliver, unlike the large pharmaceutical companies who have huge budgets to publicise their latest targeted drugs?

So what can be done about this? This morning, it gives me great pleasure to tell you that this year, on the centenary of Marie Curie's second Nobel Prize, radiotherapy is receiving a very welcome boost to its profile. I'm delighted to announce that 2011 has been designated as the Year of Radiotherapy.

Some of the UK's leading organisations have joined with the Society of Radiographers to run a year-long campaign to raise awareness of radiotherapy. The campaign is not only to help the public and to inform the media, but also, very crucially, to advise politicians and commissioners to truly appreciate the vital role that radiotherapy plays in the treatment and curing of cancer.

The Society of Radiographers will be working with the Royal College of Radiologists, the Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine, Cancer Research UK, our industrial partners, the NHS, and representatives from a huge range of other organisations all across the country in a programme of awareness through local and national initiatives.

And may I just say at this point that it is so heartening to see so many professional bodies and agencies collaborating together on this initiative, all working together with one common goal, talking with a united voice to provide the information and, ultimately, to improve patient care. I applaud everyone who has worked very hard to bring this plan together.

In truth, this task has already started. Earlier this week, a number of health professionals were invited to attend a briefing at the Houses of Parliament to talk to MPs about today's launch of the Year of Radiotherapy. This included two therapy radiographers – members of the Society and College of Radiographers – who were invited to present to MPs along with a clinical oncologist. MPs were told about the significant benefits radiotherapy brings to people with cancer. It was also stressed how important it is to ensure that radiotherapy

services are not only protected during these difficult times, but are also enhanced. And the feedback from that meeting has been very positive, not only indicating a genuine interest from MPs, but also that our two representatives finished the briefing by holding a question and answer session, which engaged with all the MPs present and I'm sure that's no mean feat!

Now, you're probably wondering why I've walked up here with some newspapers this morning. We will also be talking to journalists and, in fact, they've already picked up the message. There is a piece in *The Telegraph* this morning entitled 'Choosing therapy could save thousands of cancer patients', and there's a similar headline here, on the *Daily Express*. But even more importantly, in this modern age, on the main page of The Sky News website, the main story is the story of radiotherapy and the place that it takes in the treatment of people with cancer. There is a lovely video clip and we have it running on the Society of Radiographers' stand next door, if anybody wishes to see it. Please go in and have a look at it, it really is very, very good.

A slot was also booked for an interview on the *Today* programme on Radio 4, but it was cancelled last minute due to the increasing political unrest in Egypt, but hopefully it will be rescheduled. And the case for radiotherapy will also be featured in *Casebook* on Radio 4 on 8 February, and we wish to thank Julia Solano, the radiotherapy services manager at UCLH for allowing the media access to her department to enable them to make the programme.

But the message in all of this media interest is that whilst forty two per cent of patients receive radiotherapy, research suggests that it should be fifty percent, and if that was to happen it would have a potential saving of 30,000 patients a year, which is a very strong message to be out there.

So you can see that things are already rolling on and throughout this year we will be working to keep radiotherapy on both the news agenda and the political agenda. I'm now going to encourage all of you to play your part in this Year of Radiotherapy. It provides you with an exciting and unique opportunity to help people to update their knowledge of radiotherapy. You can explain how it is helping people with cancer, while trying to remove some of the outdated views and reduce the fear which exists. At the end of the year we will be conducting the same survey and I really, truly, believe that with your help we can shift the public's perception towards radiotherapy. We want everyone to understand that while the first steps into radiotherapy were taken by Marie Curie in the Victorian era, the road we have travelled since and the knowledge that we have gained has helped create a modern service, which is definitely part of the 21st Century. What greater tribute could there be to the legacy of such a remarkable lady?

At the Society and College of Radiographers, we have been working closely as key partners in this national work. We will lead on that. But it will be up to you drive this locally and to move it forward in the communities that you serve. And we invite you, as expert professionals working within radiotherapy, to work with your colleagues in promoting the benefits of radiotherapy to your local populations. Developing local campaigns and opening your centres to the public will be important to ensure that patients are in a position to be better informed, enabling them to ask their doctors about the value of radiotherapy following their diagnosis of cancer. In this way, we can help ensure that radiotherapy is available and patients feel able to agree to radiotherapy, where their cancer teams feel it will be beneficial to them. But this can only be achieved through a concerted effort from all of you around the UK. We hope that through raising the awareness to the wider public,

including government and commissioners, that all will be more aware of the benefits of radiotherapy and ensure appropriate investment and support for this much underrated service.

I know what I've said is not news to you this morning, but if you wish to find out more about this campaign, please do not hesitate to contact Charlotte Beardmore, your professional officer. She will be here all weekend, so please come and have a chat with her. And also, if you think about it over the next few days and go back to your departments and talk it over, you can always contact her by email. And I'm led to believe that the website will also be producing an area in the near future where you'll be getting some advice and some further information, and also we can publicise events.

So now, I would like to take this opportunity to officially open the 2011 College of Radiographers' Annual Radiotherapy Conference. I hope that when you finally leave, you're full of enthusiasm to take part in this once in a lifetime opportunity to promote your service. No one knows the service better than you – you have the information relating to patient care and the service that you deliver. I know we are all facing challenging times, but this is a very positive initiative with the potential to enhance and improve radiotherapy services nationwide for the years to come.

In conclusion, enjoy your time at the conference, and I look forward to hearing about, or perhaps participating in, some of the events that you have to promote 2011: the Year of Radiotherapy.