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THE SOCIETY OF
RADIOGRAPHERS



What is the Society of Radiographers?

With 30,000 members the Society of Radiographers is the professional association and trade union for the clinical imaging and radiotherapy workforce in the UK. Under its umbrella is the College of Radiographers, a registered charity which exists for the benefit of the public. The Society of Radiographers has no party political affiliation and its members work locally and nationally to improve healthcare for society. They do this through the promotion of social justice and public service and through their own personal and professional development. The College of Radiographers exists to promote the science and practice of clinical imaging and radiotherapy for the benefit of all. This is done through the setting of standards for education and practice, promoting and conducting research, listening to patients and healthcare service users.



A Career in Therapeutic Radiography

Therapeutic Radiography offers a range of exciting career opportunities for intelligent and caring men and women. This leaflet gives some basic information about the qualifications, skills and attributes required to enter this cutting edge profession, which combines the most up to date science and technology with the care of the patient. More information is available on the Society of Radiographers' radiography careers website at www.radiographycareers.co.uk.

What do therapeutic radiographers do?

Therapeutic radiographers make up about 10% of the radiographer workforce (the other 90% are diagnostic radiographers, please see the *Career in Diagnostic Radiography* leaflet for more information about this discipline). They specialise in the planning and administration of radiotherapy treatment for patients, most of whom have cancer. Therapeutic radiographers have regular contact with patients before, during and after their treatment. They use a range of technical equipment to deliver accurate doses of radiation to the tumor to destroy the diseased tissue, while minimising the amount of radiation to surrounding healthy tissue. Therapeutic radiographers work as part of the oncology team.

A Career in Therapeutic Radiography

In the United Kingdom the majority of therapeutic radiographers work in the National Health Service, but excellent career opportunities also exist in the independent sector.

What are the characteristics of a successful radiographer?

The demand for radiotherapy is ever-increasing, so radiographers have to be able to work efficiently while under pressure. They deal with a wide variety of patients and frequently see the patient many times during a course of treatment that may run over several days or weeks. Good communications skills and empathy, with the ability to gain the patient's trust in a short space of time, are essential. You have to be prepared to work hard. You have to respond to the individual patient's needs. Almost all of your patients will be living with the shock of a cancer diagnosis and its impact on them and their loved ones. One patient may be a seemingly perfectly well and fit young man, the next an elderly lady in the early stages of dementia, the next an anxious patient with a limited command of English, each of whom will have their own special needs and require a tailored approach.

As a therapeutic radiographer you will see things you may find distressing, especially as you may feel you have got to know a patient and their loved ones well during a course of treatment. A steady temperament and resilience are invaluable. Fundamentally, you have to care about people and be willing to help them. On the positive side cancer survival rates are improving all the time and you'll be playing a major part in the curing of many patients. When a cure is not possible there is much that can be done by way of palliative care and this is in itself an important aspect of the radiographer's work.

How do you become a radiographer?

Currently the standard route into therapeutic radiography is a three year Honours degree programme (four years in Scotland). Universities set their own entry requirements so check their individual websites to find out more. The general requirements are usually 240 to 300 UCAS tariff points, good maths and English GCSE/standard grade passes and A-Levels/Highers or equivalent in science subjects.

If you don't have the standard entry qualifications, universities will often look

at your educational achievements and experience to see if they can offer you a place. If you don't have the relevant science background, there is the option of taking an access course. There are a few other options available, although opportunities are limited. For more information visit www.radiographycareers.co.uk/how-do-i-become-radiographer

All radiography education programmes are based on a combination of academic study and practical education and training in the hospital/clinical environment. This can be an exhilarating time of new experiences and meeting new people, but it can be demanding, so again resilience and a capacity for hard work are required.

University and clinical staff understand the challenges of training as a radiographer and are always willing to give advice, help and support.

What can I look forward to in a career in radiography?

The demand for radiographers is growing worldwide. In the UK most radiographers start their career with a practitioner role in an NHS or occasionally independent sector or private setting. Going forwards many radiographers specialise in a particular aspect of radiotherapy, such as treatment planning, specialised procedures, the prescribing of medication and treatment to deal with the side effects of radiotherapy and palliative care and this will entail additional study and qualification at Masters level. Research is a vital component of clinical practice and UK therapeutic radiographers undertake and publish world-class research.

Clinical career progression will usually involve greater levels of clinical responsibility and decision making regarding the care and management of the patient and many therapeutic radiographers routinely undertake work that only a decade or two ago was the remit of the consultant doctor. As well as progressing in a clinically-based career (in which you may be involved in teaching, service development, audit and research) there are opportunities in education, health service management, full time research and industry.

Internationally UK educated radiographers are well regarded and many spend some years of their career working overseas. It is inevitable that, as increasing global prosperity leads to greater spending on healthcare, the demand for highly-trained radiographers, whether in clinical practice, education or research and development, will increase.