NPDP Meeting at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital

LYNDAL DELANEY, ACTING RADIATION THERAPY EDUCATOR AT THE ROYAL PRINCE ALFRED HOSPITAL COORDINATED AN INFORMATIVE EDUCATION SESSION.

On Friday 6th May, the Department of Radiation Oncology at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital (RPAH) hosted the second National Professional Development Programme (NPDP) meeting for 2011. There was a great level of attendance of NPDPs from radiotherapy centres across NSW, and those present were fortunate to have the opportunity to hear from a diverse range of speakers from various professional backgrounds throughout the day.

The first session was presented by May Whittaker, a Senior Medical Physicist from RPAH. She delivered an excellent two-part presentation beginning with an overview of the role of physicists in a radiotherapy department. This gave the NPDPs a fantastic insight into the “behind the scenes” world of physics with many commenting afterwards that they now had a much better understanding and appreciation of the role of physicists in the radiotherapy team. May also provided a brief intermission of hilarious physics jokes before proceeding to deliver a great presentation on Total Body Irradiation, discussing the technique, rationale, dosimetry and treatment delivery.

The programme then shifted from physics to research, with the next two sessions based on the group research projects conducted by RPAH’s 2010 PDYs and 2011 NPDPs. Anna Wotton, representing the 2010 PDY group, presented PET-CT feasibility in a radiotherapy department. Her presentation centred on the pros and cons of using this technology and her discussion into the interesting logistical issues and considerations left the audience amazed by the huge amount of effort and preparation required in the actual implementation of PET-CT in a radiotherapy department.

The 2011 NPDPs then followed on by presenting their project regarding the revision of RPA’s current normal tissue tolerance tables. The group did a great job of outlining their project and also gave an insight into the issues that they have encountered thus far, sharing their experiences in the hope of assisting other NPDPs with their own research efforts.

After a short break for morning tea, which was kindly provided by RPAH’s NPDPs, the programme recommenced with a theme of patient care. Joanne Meehan, the State Manager for Look Good… Feel Better engaged the audience with an enthusiastic presentation on the Look Good… Feel Better programme, which is a community service initiative dedicated to helping Australians cope with and manage the side effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy. She discussed the positive effect of the programme in restoring patients’ appearance and self-image and emphasised the important role of radiation therapists in encouraging their patients to attend. It was a fantastic session
and received rave reviews from the audience. Joanne’s presentation certainly inspired all of the NPDPs in attendance to return to their departments and champion the cause.

The next session moved onto another important aspect of patient care with Katina Varelis, the Director of Health Language Services from Liverpool Hospital, delivering a presentation on cross-cultural communication and working with interpreters. She provided a comprehensive insight into the role and use of interpreters in the clinical setting. Also during the session, Katina discussed appropriate and effective methods for communicating with patients from all cultural backgrounds which, as many NPDPs commented, is an extremely important skill for them to develop as radiation therapists.

At this point in the programme there was a well-deserved lunch break. The NPDPs enjoyed a lunch of Newtown’s best local Thai cuisine while also using the break as a great opportunity to reconnect with past university friends and fellow NPDP colleagues from other departments.

After lunch, the programme started with a focus on new technology in radiation therapy. Things started with a stereotactic radiotherapy (SRT) session where the NPDPs rotated through a tutorial on the Novalis Tx Linear Accelerator and a presentation. Kate Forbes, Acting Senior Radiation Therapist at RPAH, delivered an informative presentation, providing a thorough overview of the rationale of stereotactic radiotherapy, which NPDPs found very interesting. The tutorial session, facilitated by myself, was greatly appreciated by the NPDPs for its practicality, providing a unique opportunity to see the equipment in action and observe a typical patient setup using technology specific to the Novalis Tx SRT system at RPAH.

The final session for the day continued on a similar theme with a presentation on stereotactic lung radiotherapy by Darren Martin, Assistant Director of Radiation Therapy at RPAH. He discussed the simulation, planning and treatment processes involved in the Stereotactic lung technique and his presentation left NPDPs commenting on his clear explanations and humorous analogies which were integral in helping them understand this advanced technique.

Overall, the NPDP meeting at RPAH was a great success. Feedback received on the day was overwhelmingly positive and we would like to thank the NPDPs who attended for participating in this event. A big thank you also goes out to all of the presenters who kindly volunteered their time and effort to our programme – your contribution was very much appreciated.