

Radiotherapy Board

An open letter from the Radiotherapy Board¹ to all NHS healthcare organisations providing radiotherapy services within the UK

In August 2017 the Royal College of Radiologists (RCR) published *Radiotherapy target volume definition and peer review – RCR guidance*². This contains important recommendations with a clear rationale for making an essential change to practice and outlines a practical framework of support for all professional groups involved in radiotherapy planning.

The Radiotherapy Board endorses and supports all recommendations contained in the guidance document.

In addition, as it is one of the Radiotherapy Board's priorities to advise stakeholders and policy makers about future workforce requirements, we wish to highlight some specific recommendations to healthcare organisations with responsibility for providing radiotherapy services:

- Routine quality assurance by peer review of volumes is proposed as a standard part of quality clinical practice and should be included in job plans. Employers have a duty to support such quality assurance as part of their role as defined by the Ionising Radiation [Medical Exposure] Regulations (IR[ME]R).
 - Professionals involved in contouring should have protected time in their job plans for target volume definition and for peer review of target volumes. No other tasks should be booked simultaneously
 - Healthcare organisations should provide an appropriate working environment, including information technology infrastructure to facilitate target volume definition, with remote view and definition between centres
- The guidelines are written as though a consultant clinical oncologist is defining the volumes and providing peer review. However, as stated in the document, other competent specialists may also perform these tasks and employers have a duty to support peer review as part of quality assurance for all staff acting as the 'operator' in IR[ME]R terms, for example radiographers, clinical scientists and technologists, radiologists and senior oncology trainees.

The publication of the RCR's guidance doesn't simply highlight the importance of embedding peer review into clinical practice, it effectively lays down a challenge to the whole radiotherapy community to implement it.

The Radiotherapy Board supports the position of The Royal College of Radiologists, the Society and College of Radiographers and the Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine that radiotherapy service specifications should include a requirement to provide peer review of volumes.

The Board recognises the challenges and resource implications for already stretched radiotherapy services^{3,4}, but we end this open letter to all responsible healthcare organisations with what we believe is the most important and powerful statement contained in the guidance:

“As a community, we need to implement peer review as rapidly as possible. Our patients deserve no less”.



Mr John Burton, DCR(T)

Chair of the Radiotherapy Board 2017-18

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¹ The Radiotherapy Board was established in 2013 by The Royal College of Radiologists, the Society and College of Radiographers and the Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine (IPEM) to provide guidance, oversight and support for the continuing development of high-quality radiotherapy services for cancer patients in the UK. It has representation from across the four UK nations and from other organisations closely involved in radiotherapy services.

² Radiotherapy target volume definition and peer review – RCR guidance
<https://www.rcr.ac.uk/publication/radiotherapy-target-volume-definition-and-peer-review>

³ Full Team Ahead: Understanding the UK non-surgical cancer treatments workforce - CRUK
http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/full_team_ahead-full_report.pdf

⁴ All Party Parliamentary Group on Cancer Inquiry. Progress of the England Cancer Strategy: Delivering outcomes by 2020?
<https://www.macmillan.org.uk/assets/progress-of-the-england-cancer-strategy-delivering-outcomes-by-2020.pdf>