

Therapy – Detailed Information

Therapeutic radiographers treat patients, mostly those with cancer, using ionising radiation. They are responsible for the accurate planning and delivery of a prescribed dose of radiation to specific areas of the body and wider aspects of oncology. Additionally, they play an important part in helping patients to cope with the daily physical and psychological problems associated with having radiotherapy treatment, including information, support and counselling.

Radiographers require good interpersonal skills to deal with patients of all types and ages, many of whom need considerable reassurance. It is therefore essential that radiographers develop excellent communication skills.

All areas of the body can be treated with radiotherapy including external X-ray beams from large linear accelerators and cyclotrons, brachytherapy, which uses sealed radiation sources placed in body cavities or tissues, and by unsealed radioisotopes that are injected or taken orally into the body.

Once the treatment areas have been localised using an X-ray simulator and a CT scanner, it is the responsibility of the therapy radiographer to determine the arrangement of the radiotherapy treatment beams and the daily dose of radiation. This is to ensure that the tumour receives the maximum radiation dose whilst surrounding healthy tissue receives a much lower dose.

Radiographers deal with patients of all types and ages, from the very young to the elderly. Also patients with physical conditions such as being blind or being terminally ill. The aim of the 'groups that need special care' unit is to increase the student's awareness of the patient's physical and psychological needs.

Before a patient can undergo radiotherapy the treatment programme has to be planned. The planning process is crucial in therapeutic radiography and normally takes place in two stages. The first stage is called localisation and identifies the location and size of the tumour. It normally happens during the patient's first visit. Depending on the type of cancer, a CT or MRI scan may also be performed to help localise the tumour. The second stage is dosimetry, which is considered in year 2 of the therapy course.

There is an increasing recognition of the need for the graduate professionally qualified radiographer in all spheres of the clinical practice. Graduate radiographers are well qualified for a wide range of posts and some specialise in such areas as those listed here.

Radiographers don't only practice within the NHS some work within private health care or abroad, Australia is a popular choice.

At senior level radiographers are also accountable for capital and revenue expenditure and human resource management.

Other radiographers go into teaching or research.

Manufacturers also employ radiographers as application specialists.