

President's annual report 2014

Dear colleagues,

Right now, the profession of medical physics appears to be caught in a paradox. We have more technologies for use in patient treatment than ever before, but we have less time than ever to understand them to the extent that we would like to – or arguably should.

Seen from another perspective, our medical colleagues and their patients must invest more trust in us than in the past because the technology has become much more complex, and thus more difficult for non-specialists to fathom. At the same time, they could be forgiven for wondering what it is that we physicists actually do.

When the technology in the department is functioning well, it seems to work as if automatically (and sometimes, indeed, it does work by itself). In reality, however, we physicists must do more and more tasks to keep the technology functional that are essentially hidden from outside view.

As soon as something doesn't work, we are immediately asked why, and stoppage can rapidly become a crisis. There is not always widespread understanding that the technology is complicated, sometimes temperamental, and requires considerable observation and diagnosis to make sure that it is functioning safely. Under such pressure, there might be a temptation for us to "relax" a bit on basic medical physics and act more like technical engineers.

Yet that is not our job! As medical physicists, our paramount responsibility is for the quality and the accuracy of patient treatments. Therefore, we should show how important our work is and how medical physics (and, indeed, basic medical physics) underpins all of these high-tech treatments. This is not being old fashioned – it's about being professionally rigorous. It worries me when candidates for the specialization in medical physics do not clearly know what a depth dose curve is and how it changes with varying parameters, or how we calculate the dose with reference beam data. The message is that if you lack basic medical physics, then you will not be able to understand what is happening when advanced technologies go wrong, and how to respond to it in a way that ensures patient safety and well-being.

This is the paradox that we face: we are increasingly seen as engineers – and there is every temptation to be engineering-oriented – when basic medical physics skills are more important than ever to keep sophisticated clinical technologies running.

I think I'm being realistic in acknowledging a real challenge we face in showing that there is a lot of hard medical physics work to keep the technology working smoothly and safely. Nevertheless, the future of medical physics remains bright. The increased complexity of care means that we will inevitably play more of a core role in radiotherapy. We should love our jobs because ultimately medical physics is very meaningful. What we are doing is really helping people. This is the main reason that I continue to wake up in the morning, knowing that I will enjoy what I will do during the day.

Looking back over the past year, here is a review of some of the activities that the SSRMP was involved in in 2014.

There were four board meetings during the year. As in previous years, there was an excellent atmosphere during the board meetings and there was unanimous support for all of the decisions taken. Among the decisions and discussions of the board, and the achievements of our society in 2014, here are some of the important points:

- BAG

We had two meetings with BAG in 2014.

The new radiation protection ordinance is under revision. We were asked by BAG to make a proposition for the definition of medical physicist that could be included in the new ordinance. We will be consulted about the content of the full new version, which will probably come out in 2015.

Another important topic is the preparation of clinical audits. Working groups have been set-up by BAG where R. Seiler, V. Vallet and H. Roser are our delegates.

- SRO

We enjoyed fruitful collaborations with SRO in 2014. First of all, SRO supported us for the annual intercomparison by encouraging centres to participate in the 2014 edition – this in spite of the fact that there was a fee for participation for the first time. I take the opportunity to thank H. Schiefer for the management of the intercomparison for many years. In 2015 he will pass the relay for the Swiss intercomparison to C. Bailat and the IRA team.

Secondly, we jointly organized an education day on the topic of “Stereotaxy and hypofractionation”. More than 100 participants attended the meeting and the quality of the invited speakers was excellent. An especially appreciated foreign invited speaker was M. van Herk from the NKI. We were honoured to have him and the other speakers in attendance. I would like to thank here D. Zwahlen for his help with the organisation of the day. We will certainly repeat a joint meeting between the societies in the future.

Thirdly, SRO agreed to participate in the education of future medical physicists by proposing teaching courses in clinical radiotherapy. The first block will be offered in 2015.

Last, but not least, as for several years now, delegates of SRO participated in the SSRMP certification exams and SSRMP delegates participated in the FMH exam in radiation oncology.

The collaboration between our two societies is extremely important and I hope that it will continue in the future.

- Professional committee (Frédéric Corminboeuf), education committee (Hans Roser) and science committee (Peter Manser)

The chairs of the three committees have issued their own reports, which were included in the last Bulletin. However, here are some of the highlights from the committees:

Eleven candidates successfully passed the examination for SSRMP certification in medical physics. A warm welcome to these new colleagues!

During the AMP meeting, D. Frauchiger, chair of the working group for the update of recommendation Nr 11, presented the new version of the most useful recommendations from our

society concerning the QA of linear accelerators. The recommendations have been accepted by the board and are valid from 1.1.2015. A warm thank you to D. Frauchiger and the members of the working group for their work.

Another active working group is the one dedicated to stereotaxy. Regular meetings are organized by A. Mack in different Swiss centres. The purpose of the meetings is to allow interested people to exchange experience and information and also to get a better understanding of who is doing what in stereotaxy.

Two research projects were awarded the Varian main prize in 2014; Dominik Henzen for forward treatment planning for modulated electron radiotherapy (MERT) employing Monte Carlo methods (Henzen et al. Med Phys. 2014, 41(3)), and Stephanie Lang and colleagues for the development and evaluation of a prototype tracking system using the treatment couch (Lang et al. Med Phys. 2014, 41(2)). There is excellent research and development work being carried out in Switzerland.

Unfortunately, no research grant was awarded in 2014.

- Annual Congress 2014

Every three years the Dreiländertagung is organized jointly with DGMP and ÖGMP. As you know, it took place in 2014 in Zürich. You can read the summary of the meeting in the previous Bulletin, but I have to say that I was very impressed by the organisation of that meeting. And that is mainly due to the president of the meeting: S. Klöck. I am certain that all participants would join me to warmly thank Stefan for the excellent organisation of the 2014 Dreiländertagung!

- 50th anniversary of SSRMP

Technically, I shouldn't mention the 50th anniversary celebrations because I was no longer president when the anniversary took place. Nevertheless, I take this opportunity to remind you that it was a very nice day in Luzern with very interesting (and sometimes crazy) talks about the past and future of medical physics. Participants were bounced forward and backward in time by fine speakers who are to be congratulated for their talks. That day, and the tangible souvenir in the form of the golden booklet "Anniversary publication", was organized by a small committee chaired by W. Roser. Colleagues who participated will remember it fondly for a long time, and that is because R. Seiler, J. Roth, W. Seelentag and W. Roser took a lot of time to make the day as nice as it was. Therefore, I would like, in the name of all members of the Society, to deeply thank them for that amazing day!

During that event, W. Seelentag and L. André received the Théophile Christen medal of SSRMP. Everyone knows these two colleagues (and if you don't know them, go to the previous bulletin to read the laudatio in their honour prepared by H. Schiefer and E. Born. Or have a look through previous Bulletins - these two colleagues have done a lot for our Society, and for a long time!). Our society is proud to honour them with that medal: they deserve it! Congratulations!

- Bulletin and website

There were three editions of the Bulletin in 2014. N. Corradini, S. Bulling, and R. Müller are warmly thanked for their work. By the way, I tell you a secret: I have to thank Shelley quite a lot, because she has corrected my poor English in all "President's letter" and "President's annual reports" that were signed by me. That is the reason why the English content was so good: I am for nothing in it... Don't forget to participate in the Bulletin by sending papers, information, feedback, etc...

The update of our website was to be my last work as president. Unfortunately, it wasn't possible to finalize it in time. However, it is already well under way and 2015 will be the year of a brand new website! During that time, W. Seelentag is still maintaining the actual website and I must say that I am impressed by his patience. So thank you Wolf for your continued work for SSRMP.

Someone once said "Quatre ans, c'est long et c'est court en même temps" (guess who and when! For a hint, have a look back to my introduction in the Bulletin). I could say the same however "cinq" instead of "quatre". Being president of our society for the past five years has been a great honour for me. More importantly, it has been a great and fascinating opportunity to see how things are progressing in each part of the society and how the relationships with our outside partners are evolving. It has been an opportunity to meet colleagues in different situations and to share (or not) opinions about strategies, organisations, decisions, etc... It has been the opportunity to take an active part in the functioning of our Society. It took some time (cinq ans, c'est long...), but it has also been a very short time (... et c'est court en même temps) to try to move things in a good direction.

I am happy to look back, with my colleagues of the board, on some successes during these past five years. In particular, the fusion registration (terminology coming from IGRT!) of SPAMP and SSRMP into one single society and the implementation of article 74 al 7 have been important achievements.

Upon my departure, my main wish is to thank all of the people that I have worked with; from my colleagues of the board (special thanks!) to the chairs of working groups, event organizers, the Bulletin editors, and many others. Thank you for the very nice moments that I have passed with you!

The new president is P. Manser and I have no doubts that with him our Society will continue to defend our profession and promote education and research in medical physics with success. I hope that Peter will enjoy the job as much as I have and I wish him every success!

Je vous remercie pour la confiance que vous m'avez témoignée durant cinq ans et je vous envoie mes cordiales salutations de Lausanne.

Raphaël Moeckli, Lausanne, le 19 mars 2015.