



myworld

Ruth Conroy is a specialist registrar in clinical oncology at the Christie Hospital in Manchester, UK. She came first out of a class of 62 young oncologists from 28 countries in the learning assessment test at the end of this year's ESO Masterclass in Clinical Oncology.

■ Why I chose to work in oncology...

I didn't have much exposure to oncology as a medical student or a junior doctor so I think it held an air of mystery that made me want to find out more. I really enjoyed my first oncology job and I've been hooked ever since.

■ What I love most about my job...

I love the variety and the patient contact. It means no two work days are ever the same.

■ The hardest thing about my job...

Patients' expectations are growing and with new drugs being developed all the time it is getting increasingly difficult to talk about what comes next when treatment options are exhausted.

■ What I've learnt about myself...

I'm not very good at switching off from work but with such a demanding job it is very important to do so and I've realised how important it is to maintain activities outside work.

■ I'll never forget...

The sight and smell of my first fungating tumour! Whilst I was planning the radiotherapy with my consultant I did not

have much faith that we were going to be able to do much to help, but on seeing the patient again in a few months it really brought home to me what a massive impact we have on people's lives.

■ A high point in my career...

Obviously coming first in the Masterclass exam was a high point! Also my first oral presentation at a conference, as it made me realise how much I'd progressed in my career and that all the hard work pays off in the end.

■ I wish I were better at...

Many things! Music would be up near the top of the list, I've always admired those who can just pick up a guitar and play a tune. Hopefully one day I'll find the time for lessons.

■ The most significant innovation in my specialty in recent years...

It is difficult to pick just one but I think throughout my career I have seen vast changes in imaging techniques. As a medical student even CT was a somewhat precious commodity and it wasn't until I started work that I came across PET-CT, which is now part of the routine work-up for many cancer sites. As a

clinical oncologist it is exciting to hear of new techniques that might help with target delineation for radiotherapy planning to reduce toxicity.

■ What I value most in a colleague...

Honesty and reliability. I've found most problems can be sorted as long as people are honest about the situation. I don't expect my colleagues to have all the answers, but I want to know that I can rely on them to do their fair share of the work.

■ My advice to someone entering my specialty today would be...

Enjoy it. Starting a new job can always seem overwhelming but you are not expected to know everything on your first day so enjoy spending time with your patients at difficult times in their lives, and also being able to be at the cutting edge of medicine.

■ What I wish I had learnt at medical school...

That it is OK to not know the answer and that sometimes there is no right answer! Patients and their illnesses have not read the textbooks so may not follow the rules, so it is important to involve the individual when planning their treatment.