

2810 Avoiding a Crisis: A National Review of Implementing the Role of Advanced Practice Radiation Therapists in Ireland [abstract only]

BARRY, Laura, CLARKSON, Melanie <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3052-5230>> and BENNETT, Erica

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Laura Barry, Melanie Clarkson, Erica Bennett.

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Introduction

Advanced practice (AP) is not a new concept across the healthcare professions in Ireland. However, there is limited clinical career progression within Radiotherapy (RT) in Ireland. The catalyst for other jurisdictions across the world implementing AP roles into radiotherapy are the same impetus for change in Ireland today: an aging population, new technology, recruitment, retention, task-shifting and optimising patient-centric care.

Aims

To conduct a national study to:

1. Identify the key perceived barriers and enablers of key decision makers within RT in Ireland regarding AP implementation in radiotherapy.
2. Develop recommendations for a national AP framework specific to RT.

Methods

A qualitative study was undertaken consisting of semi-structured interviews of 10 key senior stakeholders working in academia, radiotherapy service management, radiation oncology or radiotherapy regulation in Ireland. Interview transcripts were coded and analysed independently by 2 researchers to validate the findings.

The key themes identified were:

- Training / education
- Professional development
- Governance
- Workplace culture.

Ethics approval and participant consent was sought in advance.

Results

Participants across both public and private sectors acknowledged the potential of Advanced Practice Radiation Therapist (APRT) roles to tackle recruitment and retention issues, enhance patient care and optimise service efficiency. Key findings included the need for funded education in addition to frustration around slow implementation despite widespread clinical support.

Discussion

Although increasing service efficiencies and enhanced patient experience were noted as positive results of APRT, most participants outlined the positive impact on recruitment and retention as a key by-product of introducing this role. This is particularly poignant when RT attrition rates are at an all time high, placing further pressure on the healthcare system, resulting in increased patient waiting lists, machine closures and staff burnout.

The recommendations based on the findings are:

- Establish an Irish AP implementation steering group comprising key stakeholders, chaired by a radiotherapy service manager(s), to centralise AP role implementation efforts.
- Develop an APRT-specific guidance document to supplement the existing draft government allied health framework to address some radiotherapy-specific nuances, under the steering group's oversight.
- Recognise the need for master's-level education for the role, completed in-post through a candidacy style model to ensure equal opportunities, with study time and funding incorporated into this trainee position.