

Issue date: 17 February 2009

Media Release

Innovative virtual training improves life for patients and staff

Virtual reality isn't confined to science fiction or video games, but is being used at the Royal United Hospital (RUH) to help improve the lives of patients and staff.

The hospital is using the 'Virtual Environment for Radiotherapy Treatment' or VERT, a life size computer generated image of a radiotherapy treatment room, complete with a computer generated patient! This allows hands-on training for staff outside of the clinical environment.

Radiotherapy treatment machines are expensive and demands on the service are high and, until now, the RUH has not been able to dedicate a machine solely to training. This makes VERT very cost effective. More importantly, we can help improve cancer diagnosis and treatment because we'll have more trained staff to treat a greater number of patients.

Radiotherapy services manager at the RUH, Sue MacGregor explains: "Using graphics and life size visualisations, the VERT training room is so 'real' it provides students with a unique opportunity to train without the stress of being in a clinical environment. VERT also helps to ease patients' fears. The patient can see what the machine and the room where they will receive treatment looks like and gain an understanding of the treatment before they experience it.

"The VERT system can also be used in the training of doctors, physicists and any other health care professionals wanting learn more about radiotherapy."

Therapy radiographer Alice Hobday has been helping to set up this training facility. She says: "VERT will enhance the understanding of those radiotherapy concepts which are often difficult to teach in a clinical setting. Students can get lots of hands-on experience of the precise techniques involved in setting up the machine and in directing radiotherapy treatment beams. VERT allows them to see exactly what they are treating from inside and outside the body, using 3D images.

Continued/2

Radiotherapy staff say that VERT should also provide the ideal environment for guiding apprehensive patients through the radiotherapy processes prior to treatment and help make what can be a difficult time a little bit easier.

Ends

Notes to Editors

- It takes three years to qualify as a therapy radiographer
- RUH takes three groups of radiotherapy degree students each year, approx. 10 per annum in total. Each group spends approximately 15 weeks in the department.
- There are 13 therapy radiographers at RUH
- 1,500 patients annually are treated at the RUH with a course of radiotherapy. A course can consist of up to 37 treatment sessions.