



Virtual Training to Revolutionise Cancer Treatment (图)

<http://www.firstlight.cn> 2007-05-22

18 May 2007, Radiotherapy training in England is to be revolutionised following a report published this week by the National Radiotherapy Advisory Group (NRAG).

All trainee radiographers in England will learn how to treat cancer using Virtual Environment Radiotherapy Training (VERT), a pioneering development by the University of Hull and the Princess Royal Hospital.

NRAG highlight VERT as a quick solution to increasing clinical training capacity. NRAG also believe VERT will reduce pressure on hospital radiotherapy departments and improve the training experience, thereby reducing trainee attrition rates and increasing the number of radiotherapy staff.

Ministers have now agreed funding for VERT and systems will start to be delivered to radiotherapy units later this year. All units will have a VERT system within a year.

VERT is a virtual replica of a radiation therapy room, the first of its kind in the UK, and was developed by the University of Hull and the Princess Royal Hospital, Hull. It gives users the sense of being present in an actual treatment room and offers students and practitioners the chance to hone vital skills without setting foot in the treatment room. Prior to its development, radiotherapy training was severely limited and the only option for practising skills was on real patients, increasing the potential for mistakes.

NRAG's report, 'Radiotherapy: developing a world class service for England', investigated radiotherapy resources and made recommendations for a radiotherapy service that will meet the future needs of a population, which is ageing and likely to see a higher incidence of cancer in the next 10 years.

VERT was the brainchild of Professor Roger Phillips and James Ward at the Hull Immersive Virtual Environment at the University of Hull, and Professor Andy Beavis of the Princess Royal Hospital, Hull. Professor Phillips said, "I'm thrilled that VERT has radically changed national policy of how radiotherapy students and clinical staff will be taught and trained in England. Patients will now reap the benefits of more trained radiotherapy staff, improved efficiency of existing radiotherapy equipment and being used themselves, much less for training."

Professor Andy Beavis, Principal Physicist, Radiation Physics at Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust, said, "This funding and support from the Department of Health will see this project recognised nationally. I believe it will help to cement our reputation as one of the most forward thinking radiotherapy departments in the UK."

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