

Marianne Aznar
Senior lecturer in adaptive radiotherapy
Manchester Cancer Research Centre
Division of Cancer Sciences
c/o the Christie NHS
Wilmslow Road
Manchester M20 4BX
marianne.aznar@manchester.ac.uk

Dear Sir/Madam,

I was one of the lucky recipients of the “DSKO rejselegat” in 2015. Thanks to this award, I was able to integrate the world-leading team of Professor Sarah Darby at the University of Oxford, UK. The objective of this scientific visit was to expand on the seminal work of Prof Darby’s group in radiation epidemiology, such as their New England Journal of Medicine paper on the link radiotherapy dose to the heart and cardiovascular disease in breast cancer patients (Darby et al NEJM 2013) and patients with Hodgkin Lymphoma (Cutter et al JNCI 2015).

As a radiotherapy physicist with a keen interest in the late effects of radiotherapy, I saw this visit was a unique chance to expand on my skills, learn about epidemiology and large case control studies and develop a unique niche of expertise bridging precision radiotherapy (i.e. a detailed understanding of radiation exposure in each individual patient) and the study of late effects. I was also hoping to bring this expert physics knowledge to Prof Darby’s group, where medical physics was not presented.

Thanks to the generous support of the Danish Society of Clinical Oncology (supplemented by funds from the British Heart Foundation, the Eva and Henry Frænkels memorial fund, and the Danish Cancer Society), I was able to stay in Prof Darby’s group between September 2015 and August 2016. This collaboration was so successful that it was then extended for another year on Prof Darby’s budget (until August 2017). Prof Darby’s group continued to pay for 0.1 FTE of my salary until August 2021, where I was awarded a full-time fellowship from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), which will fund my research for the next 5 years.

There is no doubt in my mind that working with Prof Darby was a step change in career, which was determinant in getting this prestigious EPSRC fellowship. Our collaboration resulted in many high impact publications (e.g. Taylor et al JCO 2018). To date, I have co-written 8 publications with Prof Darby and her group, and several more are in progress. None of this would have been possible without the support of the DSKO rejselegat, which, in my opinion, offers a unique chance for radiotherapy professionals, such as physicists, to gain academic independence and build a unique career trajectory.

I am grateful to DSKO for the opportunity to undertake this work, and I hope many early-career researchers will be able to benefit for such opportunities in the future.

Best regards
Marianne Aznar

