Radiation therapy uses radiation to treat disease. Most patients receiving radiation therapy are cancer patients. It’s a highly skilled profession and, because cancer affects so many people, qualified radiation therapists are in demand.

You will work as part of a specialised healthcare team. As a radiation therapist, you are the person within the team who plans a patient’s radiation treatment using computer technology and clinical information. You are also the person who delivers the radiation therapy using a range of high-tech treatment options and who supports the patient during their course of treatment.

“I build professional relationships with my patients, and have the opportunity to make a positive difference in their lives. I’m in the fortunate position whereby I can leave work daily, with the personal satisfaction knowing that I’ve made a difference for not only my patients, but for their whānau and friends.”

James Sandison
Radiation Therapy Graduate
Why study Radiation Therapy?
You will be working in a fast-paced, high-tech environment which also involves patient care. You will play a vital part in the treatment of cancer and learn about this disease which touches most families at some time. Due to the lengthy nature of cancer treatment, five days a week for up to seven weeks, you’ll get to know the patients and their families quite well.

Excellent communication skills are required as you will be providing a high level of care and support throughout each patient’s course of treatment. This leads to immense job satisfaction.

You will be working in a field that is globally at the forefront of research and technology development. This ensures you will keep up-to-date with new ways of treating cancer.

Careers in Radiation Therapy
There are several career opportunities for a radiation therapist. Radiation oncology departments in New Zealand are at six public hospitals (Auckland, Waikato, Palmerston North, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin), and there are private centres (Auckland, Tauranga, and Christchurch).

As a qualified radiation therapist you may have the opportunity to specialise in the area of treatment delivery, planning, research and development or clinical education. On qualification, Otago Bachelor of Radiation Therapy graduates are eligible for registration with the New Zealand Medical Radiation Technologists Board, so your employment prospects are immediate.

Radiation Therapy is an international profession and New Zealand educated radiation therapists are highly regarded overseas for their excellent level of skills and broad knowledge of the field.

Background required
Applicants will require NCEA Level 3 or equivalent level education. The subjects required for entry are: English or Te Reo Māori, or Te Reo Rangatira, or Classics, or History, or Geography, or Art History, and Mathematics or Statistics or Calculus and Biology or Physics. Admission via the other categories is based on relevant study. Upon acceptance into the programme, you will be assigned clinical placements to ensure access to the clinical aspects of the degree.

Personal attributes of empathy, attention to detail, adaptability, and excellent communication skills are required.

Admission to the programme
Admission to the programme is competitive, and involves consideration of your academic ability and your suitability to the profession, as demonstrated at an interview. Selection for interview is based on academic performance. Places on the degree programme are limited to the number of clinical placements available.

Single Programme Preference is available for students wishing to apply for Radiation Therapy. The Admissions Committee will firstly select from those applicants who are applying under Single Programme Preference. Applications are considered in the secondary school, university study/qualifications, and alternative qualification categories. Applicants who are of Māori or Indigenous Pacific descent may request this to be taken into account as part of their application.

Radiation Oncology Department visit
It is strongly recommended that all applicants visit a radiation oncology department to see what is involved in the profession. This will also be helpful for the admissions interview.

The visits take place from June onwards. Refer to the website for details: otago.ac.nz/wellington/departments/radiationtherapy/index.html

Immunity status
All applicants offered a place into the Bachelor of Radiation Therapy programme will be required to have health screening tests in New Zealand before commencement of the programme.

First aid
All applicants must have a current approved (comprehensive or level 2) first aid certificate upon entry to the programme.

The programme
The programme is based at the University of Otago, Wellington; in a class of about 30 students. The programme is full-time and will take three years to complete. In addition to the academic papers there is a large component of clinical work within the degree. The second- and third-year clinical placements are at different radiation oncology departments, which gives a range of clinical experience.

You will be required to complete work experience in a radiation oncology department in the summer breaks, to get the necessary clinical experience to meet the requirements of your degree registration.

Currently clinical placements occur throughout New Zealand and at some Australian Centres.

During the first year of the programme you will complete the following papers:

- RADT 121 Radiation Therapy Practice I
- RADT 122 Anatomy and Imaging
- RADT 123 Radiation Therapy and Oncology I
- RADT 124 Radiation Therapy Planning Concepts I
- RADT 125 Healthcare Communication
- RADT 126 Health and Human Behaviour
- RADT 127 Radiation Technology I

Postgraduate study
There are options of completing an Honours thesis and/or postgraduate papers in radiation therapy advanced practice. These can lead to a Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma, Master’s degree, and Doctor of Philosophy qualifications.

PROFILE
James Sandison
Radiation Therapy Graduate

While studying Health Sciences First Year at the University of Otago’s Dunedin campus, James Sandison attended an introductory seminar about Radiation Therapy after noticing the subject’s slogan “technology meets caring.”

“I’ve always had a passion to work in healthcare, and an interest in technology, so naturally my attention was drawn”, he says.

After researching more about Otago’s Radiation Therapy programme, James realised it was the right choice for him. The following year he moved to Wellington to study RT.

“I’ve had plenty of opportunities to gain hands-on experience with patients in a supportive environment, which ultimately enabled me to go through the transition of putting the academic concepts learnt in the classroom, into practice,” he says.

“The (RT) programme also provided me an opportunity to socially meet fellow students throughout the Wellington campus, and build relationships and bonds which last well beyond the completion of the degree.”

Soon after finishing his studies, James gained employment as a New Graduate Radiation Therapist at Auckland City Hospital. After an initial six-month contract, he was offered permanent employment as a Staff Radiation Therapist.

He’s now planning to travel to Italy to attend the European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology International Conference (ESTRO) and is considering future postgraduate study – to develop both clinically and academically.

Reflecting on how his life’s changed since attending that seminar in Dunedin, James also points out his newfound attention to detail.

“Due to the nature of radiation, we work to millimetre accuracy in all that we do, so it’s pivotal to have an eye for detail. Now in my out-of-work life I am conscious of things being spot-on accurate – which has all developed since training and working!”

For questions about Radiation Therapy
otago.ac.nz/radiationtherapy

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