

# "Every day I have the opportunity to make a difference to those affected by cancer."

Meet Sairanne to discover how her role as a therapeutic radiographer is vital in the treatment of cancer.

## Sairanne Wickers

### Consultant breast radiographer (radiotherapy)

Sairanne's interest in science, technology and people meant a career in therapeutic radiography was the perfect choice.



## Why therapeutic radiography?

I've always been interested in science at school and knew that I wanted to work in a clinical profession, just not as a doctor or nurse. I started researching allied health professions and came across therapeutic radiography. The combination of biology and physics whilst helping people suffering from cancer sounded really interesting. I spent a couple of weeks in a radiotherapy <sup>[1]</sup> department meeting the staff and patients and knew this was what I wanted to do.

## How did you become a therapeutic radiographer?

I qualified as a therapeutic radiographer after completing a three-year degree course at the University of Portsmouth. Despite the packed weeks of lectures and long hours on clinical placement, the prospect of leaving university with a vocational degree with professional qualifications and great job prospects made it all worth it. I haven't regretted it for a second.

To reach my current level as a consultant radiographer has taken a lot of hard work, some luck and great managers who have invested in my development.

## What is your day-to-day like?

On a typical day, I may get a referral for a patient who has recently had surgery for breast cancer and requires postoperative radiotherapy [1]. At my new patient clinic, I meet very anxious patients and their families, and try to reassure them about their radiotherapy [1] treatment, discuss the side effects and support them in their post-diagnosis recovery.

### What makes your role special?

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I have loved all of the roles I've worked in within radiotherapy [1] – from a newly qualified treatment radiographer to a planning superintendent and finally, my current role as a consultant breast radiographer.

Everyone in this profession really cares, and it's all about teamwork. Every day I have the opportunity to make a difference to those affected by cancer. The thank you letters from my patients are always lovely to read.

### How do you strike a work/life balance?

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I have a young family which means a work/life balance can be a challenge. I want to be a role model to my children, so they have visited me at work to see what I do. They know about bad cells, and how it's my job to help to kill them so that hopefully my patients will get better.

Learning to separate my work life from my personal life is important. When I'm at work, I'm here for my patients, and when I'm at home, I'm there for my family.

Of course, this is sometimes easier said than done. For example, when a patient receives a diagnosis that the cancer has spread, you can't help but take a little of that sadness home with you.

## What are some of the challenges?

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It can sometimes be difficult to support patients' to overcome their fears of [radiotherapy](#) [1] and to ensure that they have the best possible chance of breast cancer control.

In some ways, a major challenge I face is that many people do not know what [radiotherapy](#) [1] is. With 50% of patients diagnosed with cancer requiring [radiotherapy](#) [1], this still surprises me.

Everyone knows about doctors and nurses, but few have ever heard of therapeutic radiographers, or understand our crucial role in the treatment of cancer.

## What is the best part of your job?

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Being part of a multidisciplinary team to help give patients' the best possible chance of surviving breast cancer is amazing! It's fantastic to see the ever-increasing number of breast cancer survivors and be able to offer support to patients and their families at a very difficult time.

## Top tips for others?

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If I had one bit of advice before applying, it would be to visit a [radiotherapy](#) [1] department – meet the people you'll be working with and the patients you'll be caring for. It's really inspiring.

**Links**

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Radiotherapy>