

## The INTER-ROMA Project - A survey among Italian radiation oncologists on their approach to the treatment of bone metastases

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### ABSTRACT

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**Aims and background.** Radiotherapy has an established palliative role for bone metastases but despite the large number of patients treated there is still controversy surrounding the optimal radiotherapy schedule to prescribe. The aim of this survey was to determine the decision patterns of Italian radiation oncologists in four different clinical cases of patients with bone metastases.

**Methods and study design.** During the latest national meeting of the Italian Association of Radiation Oncology (AIRO), four clinical cases were presented to attending radiation oncologists. The cases were different with respect to the histology of the primary tumor, performance status, pain before and after analgesics, tumor site, and radiological characteristics of the metastatic lesions. For each clinical case the respondents were asked to give an indication for treatment; prescribe doses, volumes and treatment field arrangements; decide whether to prescribe prophylactic supportive therapy or not; and provide information about factors that particularly influenced prescription. Finally, a descriptive statistical analysis was performed.

**Results.** Three hundred questionnaires were distributed to radiation oncologists attending the congress. One hundred twenty-five questionnaires were returned but only 122 (40.6%) were adequately completed and considered for the analysis. Considerable differences were observed among radiation oncologists in prescribing and delivering radiotherapy for bone metastases. There was also a notable divergence from international guidelines, which will be discussed in this report.

**Conclusions.** Despite the results of clinical trials, Italian radiation oncologists differ considerably in their decisions on treatment doses and volumes. National guidelines are needed in order that patients can be treated uniformly and better data will become available for evidence-based palliative radiotherapy.

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**Key words:** INTER-ROMA, survey, palliative radiotherapy, bone metastases, patterns of care.

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