

## CAREER PROFILE – DR CLAIRE DEMPSEY



Dr Claire Dempsey is a Senior Radiation Oncology Medical Physicist Specialist at Calvary Mater Newcastle Hospital School of Health Sciences, Australia, and also an Assistant Professor of Medical Physics at the University of Washington School of Medicine, USA, and a Conjoint A/Prof at the University of Newcastle, Australia.

Additionally, Claire is the ACPSEM TEAP Coordinator Team Leader for Radiation Oncology, is a deputy editor-in-chief for PESM, and works on the Educational Team at Radiating Hope/Rayos Contra Cancer.

Claire somehow managed to find the time (!!) on top of all of these things and her other projects to provide her insightful career profile below.

### WHAT MOTIVATED YOUR INTEREST IN MEDICAL PHYSICS AS A POSSIBLE CAREER?

I had a strong interest in physics since high school, and when I was standing in line to enrol in my first year of university I spotted a program called Medical Physics (which incidentally no longer exists at that university!). It seemed to have a reasonably broad range of subjects which I thought might be helpful in determining which career path to ultimately take. When I was in my second year of university I was employed at Westmead Hospital as a “medical physics trainee” - a prototype of the current registrar system - and started working full-time whilst completing my undergraduate degree part-time. From that point on, I was hooked.

### WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT JOB AND WHAT PROJECTS ARE YOU WORKING ON?

I currently wear many “hats”. I’m a Senior Physicist at the Calvary Mater Hospital in Newcastle, NSW, and I’m also an ACPSEM TEAP Training Coordinator for the ROMP specialism. Besides that, I have academic appointments at the University of Newcastle (Australia) and also at the University of Washington (USA). I am also a deputy editor-in-chief of the ACPSEM journal, PESM (Physical & Engineering Sciences in Medicine), as well as on the Educational Team for Radiating Hope/Rayos Contra Cancer where I teach Medical Physics to colleagues living in low/middle income countries. I’m currently working quite a few different projects in these areas.

### ARE THERE ANY CHALLENGING OR REWARDING ASPECTS OF YOUR WORK?

A Registrar recently asked a question regarding “burnout”. Being actively involved in so many roles means I am constantly feeling stretched and I have an endless to-do list. One of my biggest challenges is getting the work-life balance right, which can be difficult when you have to give a 2 hour lecture that starts at midnight due to international time differences!

On the flip-side, being a contributor in so many different areas is incredibly rewarding and knowing I am making a difference, even if it’s just a single brachytherapy patient, keeps me going. There are so many opportunities out there to do amazing things - you just need to be willing to say “yes”.

### WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS IN YOUR CAREER TO DATE?

There have been a few. Firstly, working in the US was a fabulous experience which gave me a renewed sense of confidence in my abilities, and it also created some new opportunities. Secondly, teaching colleagues in low/middle income countries has changed my perception of radiation oncology and has forced me to think outside-the-box in order to come up with advice or solutions to problems that can't just be solved by adding new technology.



**WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO SOMEONE CONSIDERING A CAREER IN MEDICAL PHYSICS?**

Let me buy you a coffee and we'll have a chat!

**WHERE ARE YOU LOCATED? DOES YOUR LOCATION HAVE ANY CHALLENGES OR REWARDING ASPECTS?**

I'm located in Newcastle, NSW. I think with everything that's happened due to COVID-19, we have all recently learnt that location is far less restrictive than we might have first thought, and that an enormous amount can be achieved online and/or at home.

**WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE FUTURE FOR MEDICAL PHYSICS?**

There have been so many changes in the profession during my career that I cannot begin to comprehend where the future will take us. The only thing for sure is that with the quality of Registrars coming through TEAP in Australia, the future is in safe hands.