

## Focus on Faculty #98

### Neil Kopek



I completed my general medical studies at the University of Toronto, certain from the outset that I was destined to be.....a psychiatrist! However, the main outcome of my student research project conducted in the ENT-oncology clinics of the Princess Margaret Hospital looking at rates of clinical depression among head-and-neck cancer patients, was a piqued interest in a discipline that was largely unfamiliar to me at the time, radiation oncology. A subsequent clinical elective under the inspirational wing of Dr. George Shenouda made me decide not just on the field of radiation oncology, but radiation oncology at McGill.

Towards the end of my residency at McGill the terms SBRT (stereotactic body radiotherapy) and oligometastasis were just becoming hot topics at radiation oncology congresses around the world. The Nordic countries in particular were among the leaders taking the podium to share their early experiences applying the same principles of cranial radiosurgery to small extracranial targets. An enthusiastic chat with Professors Morten Hoyer and Cai Grau after their presentation at a congress in Paris led to an amazing fellowship experience at the University of Aarhus, Denmark. This was largely an academic fellowship with a focus on SBRT, but in addition, I also managed to pass the equivalency exams authorising me to practice general medicine in Denmark should I choose. However, after two and a half years it was time for “Nils” Kopek to come home.

My Danish days seem like yesterday and yet it is now 13 years since I have been back at McGill as a staff radiation oncologist. My main sites of clinical activity include thoracic, lower gastrointestinal and hepatopancreatobiliary malignancies. And of course, radiosurgery (cranial and extracranial) for both primary and metastatic lesions. I wear my MUHC hero pins proudly!

Collaborative work with the COMET study team, a landmark multicentre prospective randomised trial pertaining to SBRT for oligometastatic disease, is notable among my academic endeavors to date. The rapidly evolving treatment paradigm for locally advanced rectal cancer continues to hold my academic attention as well. Building upon the McGill experience with a deferral-of-surgery approach for rectal cancer patients treated with long-course pelvic chemoradiation, I look forward to the launching of the HypoOPRA protocol, a new McGill initiated organ preservation trial based on hypofractionated short-course pelvic radiotherapy.

As the radiation oncology Competency Committee Chair, I find myself among the ranks of many others across the country grappling with the new Competency-By-Design medical education paradigm. Among my administrative engagements has been the establishment of a comprehensive electronic tumour board registry/admin tool that permits efficient auditing of multiple aspects of tumour board activity at the MUHC to ensure conformity with standards set by the Collège des médecins du Québec (CMQ).

In my off hours you are likely to find me in the Laurentians, probably swimming or gardening in the summer and on the slopes in the winter, or happily sharing good food and wine with friends and family, anytime of year.