

# How to gain experience abroad

Dr Tanja Cufer, University Clinic Golnik, Golnik, Slovenia
Discussant: Dr Domen Ribnikar, Medical Oncologist, Institute of Oncology, Ljubljana, Slovenia

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# How to Gain Experience Abroad ?

Tanja Cufer, MD, PhD[1]
Domen Ribnikar, MD[2]

University Clinic Golnik[1]
Institute of Oncology Ljubljana[2]
Medical Faculty Ljubljana, Slovenia

ESCO, College of the European School of Oncology, 2020

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# Why Gain Experience Abroad ?

Aimed to:

- Get additional knowledge and improved skills in multidisciplinary cancer care
- Learn how to conduct cancer research
- Get an insight into organizational issues for cancer care
- Obtain a network for future international collaboration

Ultimate goals:

- **Transfer of knowledge and experiences to home institution/country**
- **Build on continuous international collaboration**

"Inbreeding is unhealthy – you should experience ideas of others" (Ian F Tannock)

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# Some of My Experiences Working Abroad

Clinical fellowship:

- Netherlands Cancer Institute in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1988. Mentor: Sjoerd Rodenhuis
- Stanford University, California, USA, 1992. Mentor: Saul Rosenberg, 1992

Visiting professor

- Institute Jules Bordet, Free University of Brussels, 2004

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# Transfer of Knowledge and Experiences

Position at home institution: Medical Director, Institute of Oncology, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 1994 - 1998

- Introduction of Multidisciplinary Tumor Boards (1995-1999)
- Publication of National Guidelines for each particular cancer (1995-1999)
- Recognition of Medical Oncology as a stand alone specialization in the country (2000)
- Increased participation in International clinical research (EORTC, CECOG, etc.)

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# International Clinical Research

## Accrual of patients in EORTC clinical studies in 2000 - 2006: 38 185 patients

**European Union:**
Austria: 555
Belgium: 4393
Bulgaria: 49
Cyprus: 65
Czech Republic: 114
Denmark: 348
Estonia: 6
Finland: 19
France: 7000
Germany: 2985
Greece: 48
Hungary: 169
Italy: 3358
Latvia: 5
Luxemburg: 8
Malta: 20
Poland: 853
Portugal: 531
Republic of Ireland: 82
Romania: 20
Slovak Republic: 375

**European Union (Con't):**
Slovenia: 211
Spain: 977
Sweden: 282
The Netherlands: 7640
United Kingdom: 4343



**Non-EU Countries:**
Bosnia: 8
Croatia: 288
F.R. Yugoslavia: 210
Norway: 376
Russia: 104
Switzerland: 837
Turkey: 526

**Rest of the World** = 1 314 patients

EORTC

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European School of Oncology

# EORTC Breast Cancer Group Meeting



Bled, Slovenia 1997

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# Continuous International Collaboration

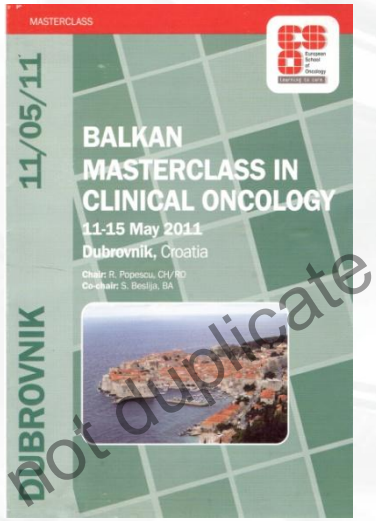
Positions at international institutions: EORTC (Board member 2006-2009; BCG chair 2009-2012); ASCO (IAC member 2007-2012,chair 2011-2012), ESMO (GC WG chair since 2019) , ESO coordinator for EE & Balkan region 2013-2015; Scientific committee member since 2020)

- Activities aimed to improve cancer care in the region
  - Position paper on Cancer care in CEE, The Oncologist 2016
  - Position paper on Research in CEE, Eur J Cancer 2018
  - European Partnership for Action Against Cancer (EPAAC), EU project 2009-2013
  - Activities related to access to novel drugs (IMPACT , CECOG Academy), The Oncologist 2018, 2020

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# Continuous International Collaboration

- International educational events
  - Central European Oncology Congress (CEOC), biannual 1998-2009; since 2010 CECOG Best of ASCO
  - International Clinical Trials Workshops (ASCO IAC), Cluj-Napoca 2011 & 2016, Opatija 2013, Cluj 2016
  - European School of Oncology (ESO) courses
    - Organ sparing treatment in Oncology, Bled 1999
    - ESO-ESMO EE Masterclass in Medical Oncology, since 2011
    - Refresher courses, Visiting professorship, etc.




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# Mentorship drawing from International Experiences

- Year 2000: Medical oncology as stand alone specialization
  - ESMO exam a mandatory part (Slovenia &Switzerland), excellent results of Slovenian fellows
  - National curriculum on medical oncology since 2000, adoption of ASCO/ESMO GC 2004 &2016
  - One year protected time for training abroad (as a research fellow or a clinical observer)

- Active participation of my fellows at international conferences
  - More than 100 abstracts; 15 active participations at ASCO/ESMO Annual Meetings
  - 40 articles in peer-reviewed International journals with Impact factor

- Participation at first Clinical Methods Workshop in Flims (3 fellows from Slovenia!)

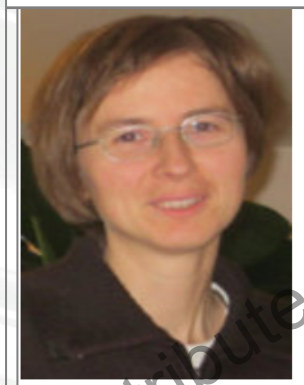
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Since 2000 31 Slovenian medical oncology residents successfully passed ESMO Exam.

ESMO > Career development > ESMO Examination

## ESMO BEST EXAM AWARD

**The ESMO Best Exam Award for academic excellence is presented annually to the oncologist who received the highest score in the ESMO Examination in Medical Oncology.**



**2014: Urska Bokal**

Out of a total of 323 candidates who sat the 2014 ESMO Examination, Urska Bokal, who sat the exam in Madrid, Spain, scored the highest mark.



Out of a total of 360 candidates who took the 2017 ESMO Examination, Nina Fokter Dovnik, who sat the Exam in Madrid, Spain, scored the highest mark.

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# Fellowship Abroad as a Major Part of Future Leaders Education



**Natasa Snoj, MD**
Research fellow
2008-2009

- Institute Jules Bordet, Brussels
- Grant: Universite Libre de Bruxelles

PubMed.gov

Are we HER-ting for innovation in neoadjuvant breast cancer trial design?
**Snoj N**, Bedard PL, de Azambuja E, Cardoso F, Piccart M.
Breast Cancer Res. 2009;11(1):201. doi: 10.1186/bcr2209. Epub 2009 Jan 16.
PMID: 19216727 Free PMC article. Review.
Cite Share

Jumping higher: is it still possible? The ALTTO trial challenge.
Tomasello G, de Azambuja E, Dinh P, **Snoj N**, Piccart-Gebhart M.
Expert Rev Anticancer Ther. 2008 Dec;8(12):1883-90. doi: 10.1586/14737140.8.12.1883.
PMID: 19046108 Review.
Cite Share

Current controversies in extended adjuvant endocrine therapy for early breast cancer.
**Snoj N**, Paridaens R, Cufer T.
Curr Opin Oncol. 2008 Nov;20(6):627-33. doi: 10.1097/CCO.0b013e3283136770.
PMID: 18841043 Review.

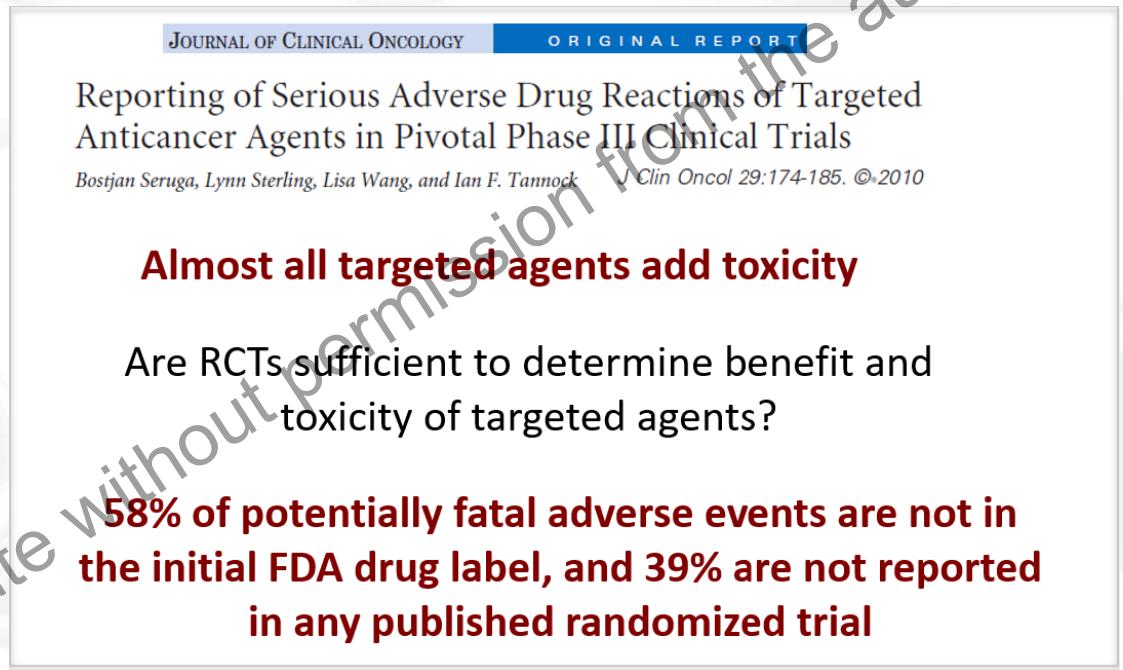
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# Fellowship Abroad as a Major Part of Future Leaders Education



**Bostjan Seruga, MD**
Clinical Research fellow
2007-2010

- Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, Hospital Toronto
- Mt. Sinai Hospital Toronto
- Fellowship funded by hosting institutions



JOURNAL OF CLINICAL ONCOLOGY ORIGINAL REPORT

Reporting of Serious Adverse Drug Reactions of Targeted Anticancer Agents in Pivotal Phase III Clinical Trials

*Bostjan Seruga, Lynn Sterling, Lisa Wang, and Ian F. Tannock* *J Clin Oncol 29:174-185. ©2010*

**Almost all targeted agents add toxicity**

Are RCTs sufficient to determine benefit and toxicity of targeted agents?

**58% of potentially fatal adverse events are not in the initial FDA drug label, and 39% are not reported in any published randomized trial**

- Since 2008: 97 publications in peer-reviewed international journals with IF.
- Current position: PhD, Medical Oncology Consultant at Institute of Oncology Ljubljana and Associate Professor at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

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# Fellowship Abroad as a Major Part of Future Leaders Education



**Domen Ribnikar, MD**
Research fellow

- Champalimaud Cancer Center, Lisbon
- Princess Margaret Hospital Toronto

- 2014: Champalimaud Cancer Center, Breast unit, Lisbon, Portugal. Mentor: dr. Fatima Cardoso
  Publication: Extended adjuvant endocrine therapy – A standard to all or some? **Ribnikar D**, Sousa B, Cufer T, Cardoso F. Breast. 2017 Apr;32:112-118.

- 2016-2018: Princess Margaret Cancer Center, UHN fellowship, Toronto, Canada. Mentor: prof.dr. Eitan Amir
  Publication: Reporting of randomized trials in common cancers in the lay media. **Ribnikar D**, Goldvaser H, Ocana A, Templeton AJ, Seruga B, Amir E. Oncology. 2018;94(2):65-71.

➢ Since 2015: 16 publications in peer-reviewed international journals with IF!

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# Experience of a Research Fellow: Outline

- How the idea of going abroad starts/evolves?
- Options of medical oncology centres abroad
- How to liaise with experts abroad?
- Competition among young medical oncologists worldwide for a fellowship position
- Working and living as a fellow (benefits, challenges)
- Experience from a fellowship and its impact on your career and personal life
- Challenges when coming back home

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# Idea of Going Abroad as a Fellow

- **Curriculum of medical oncology** offers an opportunity to spend one year abroad (usually the last year of residency)
- **Your own wishes/ambitions** (which are based on personal experience with cancer, willingness to get more knowledge about cancer research and clinical improvement)
- **Your mentor of medical oncology residency** (the mentor-mentee relationship, your mentor's experience of a fellowship or other training)
- **ESMO/ESO web-based seminars** which address topics in clinical research

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# Finding a Mentor within your Institution

**If you are in a busy clinical unit this may or may not be possible**

Your mentor should :

- Have interest and enthusiasm for research as indicated by his/her publication record – **(PubMed search)**
- Be doing research that **you** think is interesting and important
- Have supervised other juniors leading to successful projects and publications
- Be available and willing to give time – **(Talk to former mentees!)**

Courtesy of Ian F Tannock
Professor of Medical Oncology, Princess Margaret Hospital and University of Toronto

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# Fellowships with List of Current Medical Oncology Centers Abroad

- **ESMO fellowships (Clinical unit visits, Research fellowships, Translational research unit visits, European integration, ESMO palliative care fellowship):** The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust (UK), Champalimaud Cancer Center (Breast Unit; Portugal), Cambridge Cancer Center (UK), Institute of Cancer Research (Austria), Institute Curie (France) etc.
- **ESO fellowships:** Institut Gustave Roussy (France), European Institute of Oncology (Milan, Italy), Comprehensive Cancer Center Ulm (Germany), Champalimaud Clinical Center (Portugal), Clinical Center University of Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) etc.
- **Different fellowship programmes across the USA and Canada:** Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, UCSF Hematology and Oncology (San Francisco), Princess Margaret Cancer Center in Toronto (Canada) etc.
- **The Union for International Cancer Control's (UICC)** fellowship programmes

www.esmo.org/career-development/oncology-fellowships/fellowship-offers

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# How to Liaise with Experts Abroad?

- By yourself (a direct contact with an international expert in a specific medical oncology field – in person during international meeting, through electronic mail)
- By your **mentor** (their previous collaboration, former expert's trainees, your mentor's personal experience)
- By your institution (e.g. a medical oncology coordinator may contact an expert you would like to work with)

The process is complex! -> It is important to start with some clinical research already in the beginning of your residency as you can present your data internationally and therefore you can meet experts from all over the world.

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# Competition among Young Medical Oncologists Worldwide for a Fellowship Position

**Positions for fellowships are competitive!**

**Therefore:**

- Start with clinical research as soon as possible in the course of your residency with your **mentor** (retrospective, observational studies of small patient cohorts etc.)
- Try to complete the whole process of research work (an abstract-> publication in a journal
- As a junior researcher try to publish as many as possible manuscripts (not so important to which journal, IF of a journal etc.)
- Learn new strategies and techniques (much more important than site of disease)
- Try to avoid the most popular (and competitive) areas of research – think of growing areas where you can make a contribution
- When applying for a position be honest, exact and express your own interest (and NOT interest of an expert you are writing to)

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# Working and Living as a Fellow: Benefits and Challenges

## Benefits:

- **Career:** great clinical judgment, learning of clinical research, improving clinical research, **protected time** for research, learning biostatistics, improving your basic knowledge of cancer biology, collaborating in phase 2 and phase 3 clinical trials, improving in writing abstracts, improving your oncology network with your fellow colleagues, publications in journals etc.
- **Personal life:** improving your English language, more self-dependence, getting to know more colleagues around the globe, gaining new friendships, your mentality changes (forever!) – you become more self-confident, precise and a good teacher for younger colleagues, students and others.

## Challenges:

- Foreign country, foreign language, completely new (health) system, new patients, different culture, time-consuming administrative work with application for a fellowship (!), being away from your family (parents), issues with stopping working in your primary institution in your country etc.

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# My Experience from a Fellowship and its Impact on my Career and Personal Life



- **June – November 2014:** Champalimaud Cancer Center (Breast Unit): my mentor **prof. dr. Fatima Cardoso**, who additionally inspired me about breast cancer research.
  - 4 publications were published and 1 is in a submission process
  - Improved clinical skills, learned how to write good articles with an emphasis on review articles
  - Intensive collaboration in MDT boards with the whole team
  - Gained many new friends with whom we have been collaborating since then
  - dr. Cardoso was my first international mentor to whom I will always be grateful for teaching me new clinical and research skills in the field of breast cancer.

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# My Experience from a Fellowship and its Impact on my Career and Personal Life

- **September 2016 – September 2018:** Princess Margaret Cancer Center, Toronto, Canada (breast cancer clinical research fellowship): my mentor was **prof. dr. Eitan Amir**, who was an excellent mentor with an emphasis on teaching biostatistics in clinical research
  - 12 publications, 5 are in a submission process
  - 2 large research projects : 1. Lay media reporting of randomized phase 3 clinical trials and 2. Meta-analysis of efficacy, safety and tolerability of all tested drugs in phase 3 randomized trials in common cancers in the last decade
  - Improved clinical skills, collaborating in phase 2 and 3 randomized clinical trials, learning biostatistical methods in clinical research, intensive MDT board sessions, presenting new data to other members of the breast team
  - Made many new friendships with young medical oncologists from all over the world
  - Became more mature personally!
  - My second child was born in Canada!

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# Challenges when Coming Back Home

- Integrating back to your “old” system
- Collaboration with your “old” colleagues at your institution when you were doing the residency (keep in mind that you are different now and will never be the same as before you left your country!)
- A different way of caring for your patients!
- Teaching your younger colleagues of medical oncology
- Keeping in touch with your “new” friends/colleagues from abroad (common studies, continuation of writing manuscripts, webinars, gathering at international meetings)
- Structuring your own (protected) time for research to continue the work you started abroad!!

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# Acknowledgments



To my Slovenian **mentors** who inspired me with breast cancer research already in the beginning of my residency and supported me throughout the whole residency.

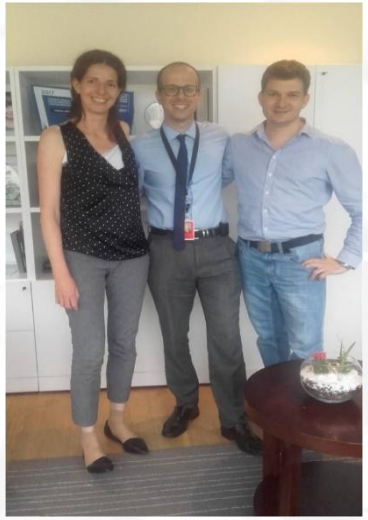
Prof. dr. Tanja Čufer, MD, PhD

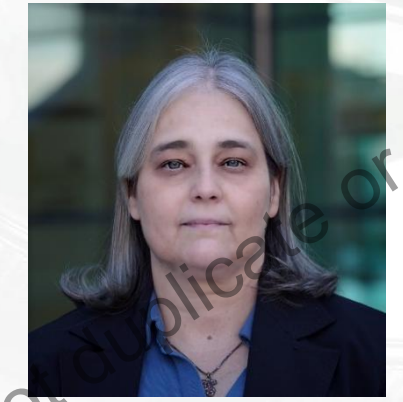


Assoc. prof. dr. Boštjan Šeruga, MD, PhD

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# Acknowledgments





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Ana Lohmann
Sara Soldera
Akina Natori
Ibrahim Algorashi
and Zachary Veitch

To my Portuguese **mentor prof. dr. Fatima Cardoso** and my fellow colleagues, especially to:

Berta Sousa and Joana Ribeiro

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# Take Home Messages

- Find a **mentor** within your institution who will help you with clinical research in the beginning of your residency.
- Submit **abstracts for presentation at international meetings** where you can meet international experts and could liaise with them.
- When applying for a fellowship be honest, exact and choose the area of interest, **you would like to research,** not an expert you are writing to!
- Have **ambition, ideas and work hard** in your everyday (routine) clinic and clinical research to provide best care for your patients!
- Try your best to **transfer a knowledge and skills** back to your institution/country. Get support from leaders and policy makers at home.
- **Maintain** and continue **international collaboration** as much as possible extend.
- **Support your fellows** in **going abroad** for a research fellowship.
- Have interest in making things better, also on long-term!

**Be patient with yourself, hard work and persistence pay off!**

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**Thank you!**

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