

Volume 9 - Issue 5, 2009 - Imaging Leaders

Interview with Prof. Hedvig Hricak

Interviewee

Prof. Hedvig Hricak

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Prof. Hedvig Hricak is a noted innovator in the field of oncologic imaging. She has helped develop new modes of imaging for different GU and GYN types of cancer, engaged in interdisciplinary research exploring minimally invasive methods for improving cancer detection and treatment, and been recognised with awards from multiple internationally-renowned organisations, including the Marie Curie Award from the Society of Women in Radiology, gold medal from the International Society For Magnetic Resonance In Medicine, Beclere medal from the International Society Of Radiology and gold medal from the Association Of University Radiologists. Here, she tells IMAGING management why there is a strong need for leadership in radiology research and how she learned to be an effective leader. Prof. Hricak has over 500 pubmed citations, is author or co-author of 19 books and 131 book chapters, and has over 14,000 scientific citations.

Please Tell Us, What Does Your Typical Daily Working Schedule Consist of?

I have meetings with my vice chairmen and with chairmen of other departments, interview applicants for positions, meet with administration, look at images of patients referred to me and after hours enjoy doing research with my associates. My workdays usually start before 8 AM and end around 8:30 PM.

What are the Most Enjoyable Aspects of Your Professional Life, and Which are Most Challenging?

Some of the most enjoyable aspects of my professional life are working with young clinical and research associates, watching them mature and become successful and, in many instances, famous. The most challenging aspects of my work are administrative, such as dealing with work distribution and financial prospects in a challenging economic climate.

With imaging becoming more important daily, the workload is continually increasing; it is very difficult to provide sufficient workspace and a large enough workforce to keep up with growth. One always needs to be flexible and adapt to change, while never losing sight of the key goals: Excellence in clinical care and continuous progress in medicine.

How did You Learn How to Manage and Lead?

The secret of learning how to manage and lead is to grow with increasingly demanding jobs. I took business courses at Wharton, and as a base it was very helpful. However, there is a difference between theory and practice.

One learns through being promoted and assuming greater responsibilities. One has to continuously evolve and look for new opportunities; furthermore, all politics is local, and one's style has to be adaptable. Management unfortunately takes increasing amounts of my time, with both the faculty and administration growing constantly.

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How Strong is the Need for Good Leadership in Medical Imaging?

In my opinion, good leadership is particularly important in academic imaging departments, as many competing concerns need to be addressed. Patient care is the basic framework on which collaborative, investigator-initiated research is built, and maintaining a balance in the department is crucial.

One also has to align priorities and strategies with the institutional mission and the available resources. Supporting research is extremely important, yet at times it can be very difficult because of the ever-increasing need for resources and continuous growth in the demand for clinical services.

Do Women Work Harder to Achieve the Same Professional Goals as Men, or is it a Non-Subject These Days?

This was more of an issue about a decade ago. Today women have almost reached parity in many fields, particularly in universities, research institutions and medicine in general. The gains continue every year. However, women often have more complex responsibilities and multiple competing priorities.

What has Been the Greatest Professional Honour of Your Career, Thus Far?

It is difficult to answer that question, as every honour, acknowledgment, patient 'thank you' or faculty member's success is a great source of satisfaction. Very recently, my faculty gave me an elegant dinner celebrating 10 years of my tenure as Chair. It was emotional, and the way I felt listening to their stories, which were full of humour and sincere gratitude, is difficult to describe.

On the other hand, if I consider entering new arenas as the most important marker of professional success, I would have to say being the first woman to receive an honorary doctorate from the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich in its more than 500-year history.

What is Your Opinion on the Situation That is Presently Unfolding, with Regards to Public Versus Private Healthcare in the U.S?

There are strong arguments for both sides and the debate is ongoing. There will probably be a compromise solution, most likely unsatisfactory to both sides, but somehow workable. One point is clear: The continuous increases in healthcare expenditures must be contained, but without affecting progress in medicine.

I am a big believer in personalised medicine, also referred to as predictive healthcare. Not only are we going to achieve better patient outcomes, but we will spend less money on unnecessary or ineffective procedures and treatments.

You are a Noted Pioneer in the Field of Molecular Imaging – How do You See Your Role Here?

Thank you for the compliment – but I am not a pioneer. I am lucky to be surrounded by brilliant minds in our department and institution. I support their work and provide the infrastructure in which they can flourish and break new ground. I also contribute to and support translational research to bridge basic science and clinical medicine.

What Elements do You Find Most Exciting About Molecular Imaging?

Working in a leading oncology research institution, it becomes obvious that the future of oncology and of medicine as a whole lies in personalised medicine. Molecular imaging will contribute in providing essential biomarkers and will add to the most important paradigms in personalised medicine. Cooperating with gifted colleagues to advance molecular imaging and personalised medicine is exciting and most inviting.

Finally, Please Share with Us Your Favorite Memory from Your Days as a Medical Resident.

My favourite memories are of getting involved in developing approaches for the study of renal disease and renal transplant rejection during the early days of ultrasonography.

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