RADIATION THERAPY and RADIATION THERAPISTS

Radiation therapy is the careful use of various kinds of high-energy ionizing radiation, such as X-rays, gamma rays, electrons, and protons, to treat cancer and other diseases.

A radiation therapist works as an integral member of a team of radiation oncology health professionals who use a variety of different ionizing radiation to treat cancer patients. Cancer is a very common disease, and radiation therapy can CURE cancer in the majority of patients and definitely improve the quality of life in others. As a therapist, you can positively impact the lives of all the patients you treat.

The radiation therapist is directly responsible for the actual daily treatment of patients with the use of sophisticated radiation-producing equipment. Since radiation treatments are usually given daily for seven or more weeks, the radiation therapist has the opportunity to develop a close relationship with each patient. The therapist can also participate in a wide range of other tasks, including the simulation of the area to be treated (here you will be using your medical radiography skills), the hand and computer calculations of the radiation dosage, as well as the construction of patient immobilization and beam shaping devices.
WORKING CONDITIONS
Radiation Therapy is usually administered on weekdays, during normal business hours; there is very little on-call work. Radiation therapists are employed in freestanding centers, community hospitals, and academic teaching centers. Some departments employ one or two therapists, while others may have more than a dozen. Radiation therapy is a very active profession; therapists are constantly walking and talking, moving patients and equipment.

THE EMPLOYMENT MARKET
The job market for therapists can fluctuate according to geographic region. Graduates who are place-bound will very likely experience difficulty. Over the last three and a half decades almost all of our graduates who have passed their licensing exam and have actively looked for positions have found employment, although some have had to move and some start out in per diem or temporary positions. The 2014 Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics lists the median average annual salary for radiation therapists as $77,560. Salaries typically are higher in larger metropolitan areas, and lower in smaller communities. See http://upstate.edu/chp/programs/rt/rtmissionandgoals.php for the program effectiveness data.

GRADUATE MOBILITY
Our graduates are eligible to apply to take the national board exams. This qualification is nationally recognized. Most of our graduates start their careers as staff therapists in departments across the United States. With more experience and further education, many have moved into positions in medical dosimetry, and administration. A smaller number have gone on to become medical physicists, physician assistants, and physicians.

THE MISSION AND GOALS
The primary mission of the Radiation Therapy Program is to educate competent entry-level radiation therapists. See http://upstate.edu/chp/programs/rt/rtmissionandgoals.php

PROGRAM OF STUDY
For both the BS and BPS programs of study see: http://upstate.edu/chp/programs/rt/study.php

PREREQUISITES FOR ADMISSION
SUNY Upstate is an upper-division transfer college specializing in health care careers. Students applying to our bachelors programs take the prerequisite courses (minimum 60 semester hours) at another college and then complete their junior and senior years at Upstate. See http://www.upstate.edu/chp/programs/rt/rt_reqs.php for more details including the difference between the BS and BPS admissions requirements and http://upstate.edu/chp/admissions/ for general questions about admissions.

THE PROGRAM STRUCTURE
Our program is 5 semesters long and leads to a bachelor of science or a bachelor of professional studies degree. The program can only be taken on a full time basis. We admit a limited number of students each year so that all of our student receive close, personal attention. Beginning in the fall only, the program includes five consecutive semesters of classroom and clinical courses.

Starting after the junior spring break, students can complete 44 weeks of clinical outside the Central NY area, e.g. in Buffalo, Capital/Hudson Valley, Rochester, and/or the Northern or Southern Tier. Students request these options at the time of interview. A student can request individual rotations outside of their primary region to work with different equipment.

Junior Year Fall
Syracuse for 15 weeks: Students spend the entire first semester in Syracuse, on campus. Each week, four days are class, with one evening in lab. During the last week, one day is spent observing in a clinical setting.

Junior Year Spring
Syracuse for 8 weeks: Students spend the first eight weeks on campus, in Syracuse. Each week consists of day and
Senior Year Fall
Clinical Region for 4 weeks: Students are in full time clinical.
Syracuse for 1 week: Students spend a week in class.
Clinical Region for 4 weeks: Students are in full time clinical.
Syracuse for 1 week: Students spend a week in class.
Clinical Region for 4 weeks: Students are in full time clinical.
Syracuse for 1 week: Students spend a week in class.
Syracuse for 2/3 days: Final exams are held on campus at the end of the semester.

Senior Spring Semester
Clinical Region for 6 weeks: Students are in clinical for six weeks (36 hours per week). One half a day a week is devoted to an online Radiation Physics class.
Syracuse for 1 week: Students spend a week in class.
Clinical Region for 6 weeks: Students are in clinical for six weeks (36 hours per week). One half a day a week is devoted to an online Radiation Physics class. This last clinical period always involves clinical outside of the greater Syracuse area even for students normally assigned to Central New York.
Syracuse for 1 week: Students spend a week in class.
Syracuse for 1 to 2 days: Final exams are held on campus at the end of the semester.

CLINICAL EDUCATION REGIONS see for sites http://www.upstate.edu/chp/programs/rt/rtcclinbsites.php
Central New York#
- Syracuse#, Oswego#, Rome#, Utica, and Cooperstown,
  #The last six weeks of the senior spring semester is always spent at a location outside of the greater Syracuse area.
Rochester and Finger Lakes
- Rochester, Canandaigua, and Clifton Springs
Buffalo
- Roswell Park Cancer Institute
Southern Tier
- Binghamton, Johnson City, Elmira, Oneonta, and Ithaca.
Capital District and Hudson Valley
- Albany, Schenectady, Amsterdam, Glens Falls, Poughkeepsie, Kingston, and Fishkill.
North Country
- Watertown, Ogdensburg, Malone and Potsdam.

PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION
The program has professional accreditation from the Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology, 20 N. Wacker Drive, Suite 2850, Chicago, IL 60606-3182, 312-704-5300 http://www.jrcert.org

EXPLORING RADIATION THERAPY AS A CAREER
Contact the education coordinator, Elton Garvin (315) 464-6938, or a local radiation therapy center. Make an appointment to talk to a therapist and find out what they like about the profession. For a general video see the American Society of Radiologic Technologists career videos http://www.asrt.org/main/careers/careers-in-radiologic-technology/career-videos

QUESTIONS
If you have questions about the profession of Radiation Therapy, please contact the faculty at (315) 464-8448 or radther@upstate.edu. For questions about pre-requisites or the admissions process, please contact Student Admissions at (315) 464-4570 or admis@upstate.edu.