

Precision radiooncology enables women to maintain an active sex life after gynaecological radiotherapy

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Precision medicine in the field of radiooncology enables women to maintain an active sex life after gynaecological radiotherapy. Credit: Medical University of Vienna

Up until now, gynaecological radiotherapy for cervical, vaginal or vulvar cancer has often been associated with substantial side-effects in the vagina that prevented women from pursuing an active sex life afterwards. Using new medical methods and techniques that allow women to receive personalised and precisely tailored treatment, it is now increasingly possible for women to lead a fulfilling sex life even after undergoing radiotherapy. This point was made by Kathrin Kirchheiner, expert in sexual medicine from the Department of Radiotherapy, speaking on the occasion of the European Gynaecological Oncology Congress (ESGO), which is being held in the Austria Center Vienna from 4 – 7 November, under the aegis of MedUni Vienna.

"For a long time sexuality was a taboo subject among cancer [patients](#)," says Kirchheiner, "but new research findings and modern radiotherapy techniques now enable [women](#) to contemplate having a fulfilling sex life, even after treatment."

This is due to the combination of three mainstays of precision medicine in radiooncology: optimum prevention, precise irradiation of the tumour and subsequent sexual counselling. Preventive measures include even more careful planning of radiotherapy to direct a high dose of radiation at the tumour while sparing healthy tissue and surrounding organs, including part of the vagina, as far as possible. With the very latest radiotherapy methods of external and internal irradiation, it is now possible to adapt the treatment very accurately to the individual patient, thereby significantly minimising potential side-effects. Subsequent sexual counselling can help patients to cope better with any physical or even psychological changes they have undergone as a result of the cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Optimised collaboration

Precise and individualised [treatment](#) of affected patients is made

possible by optimised collaboration between several different departments and divisions within MedUni Vienna/Vienna General Hospital. Alongside the Department of Radiotherapy, these include the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology – in particular the Division of General Gynecology and Gynecologic Oncology headed up by Heinz Kölbl – as well as the tumour board of the Comprehensive Cancer Center Vienna (CCC) and the "Sexual Health in Cancer Patients" platform.

Every year a total of around 150 women undergo gynaecological radiotherapy at Vienna General Hospital and/or MedUni Vienna and their after-care is centred around helping them to maintain a fulfilling [sex life](#) with support from the three mainstays: prevention, precise [radiotherapy](#) and psychological support.

Provided by Medical University of Vienna

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