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**TWO PEOPLE, ONE PASSION: A JOINT Q & A WITH ISMRM PRESIDENT PIA C. MALY SUNDGREN M.D., PH.D., AND SMRT PRESIDENT CHRIS KOKKINOS, B.APPL.SC., PG.CERT.(MRI).**

CONCORD, CA, USA, February 2019

I recently spoke with both society presidents to discuss their passion for and interest in magnetic resonance (MR) and to get a sense of a day in the life for both.

**1. Why did you choose MR as a focus in your career path?**

Pia: I was very fortunate to be at a department of radiology that had an MR scanner installed quite early. As my field is neuroradiology, an area that was very suitable for investigations with MR very early on, it was not hard to be triggered and excited about what MR could show. Also, I had great senior faculty with the interest and a fabulous group of MR physicists in Lund, so for me it was a natural choice to focus on MR neuroimaging.

Chris: Early in my career as a radiographer, although I had gained experience in various imaging modalities, it was always MRI that I had a keen interest in specializing in. Perhaps this was because it was a relatively new and evolving modality at the time and I could see the scope it had to continue to develop. This meant that it would keep me interested while ensuring I would have the opportunity to continue to learn and develop. I loved that the principles and physics of magnetic resonance could be utilized on the fly by the radiographer/technologist to modify imaging parameters that influence the weighting and the quality of the resultant image.

The opportunity to work in a field where different professionals and specialists work collaboratively was also appealing, as was the ability to work directly with patients. Many patients can find the experience of undergoing an MRI examination quite intimidating, and I have always found patient care to be an essential and enjoyable part of the job.

**2. What does a typical work day look like for you?**

Pia: As the academic head of my department since 2009 and also now recently co-director for Lund Bioimaging Center, a lot of my time is spent on administration, grant writing, teaching medical students and supervising my 4 Ph.D. students, who all are involved in different projects related to MR of the brain. In addition, as I am a frequently invited lecturer, I am frequently preparing for these lectures by reading and updating myself on the latest advances. I do not only do this for lectures but my pleasure and for my research. I only work clinically 1 day a week. I love reading and discovering new exciting cases, and I love the clinical conferences where I interact with clinical pediatric neurologists, pediatric neurosurgeons, and

oncologists. I always learn something new from them and can bring some insights to the images to my clinical colleagues.

As part of my research, I have daily interactions with our great MR technicians, and I am always closely collaborating with a great team of MR physicists. Both groups are essential not only for the research but also for our clinical work. Especially the close collaboration with the MR physicists, it is crucial for the research I do. However, without the great MR technicians that are performing our research studies, it would not work. In addition, much of research I do with my Ph.D. students are on patients. I have the possibility to interact with neurosurgeons, neuro-oncologists and pediatric neurologists as well as with rheumatologists as they are co-partners in several projects.

Chris: My role as an operations manager at Epworth, a large private hospital in Melbourne, sees me managing staff from various specialty groups across many imaging modalities. At my facility, we image a mix of inpatients, outpatients and patients that present through the hospital's emergency department. It is rewarding to find that I can still use many of the workflows and processes that I had fine-tuned as a manager in MR over the years to help improve efficiencies in the other modalities which I now have oversight of. My job keeps me constantly engaged, and I enjoy the problem solving and the daily interactions I have with radiologists, radiographers, nursing staff, and our administration team, as well as researchers, physicists, and engineers. MRI, and medical imaging as a whole, is unique because so many groups must work collaboratively to achieve the best outcome for our patients.

### **3. What does a great partnership look like in your facility and how does trust play a role?**

Pia: I think the close collaboration or partnership between the MR technicians are essential and trust is crucial to make sure that you get the best results regarding images regardless if for clinical purpose or for research. I believe the same goes for the MR technicians towards me. They need to trust my faculty colleagues and me and to believe in what we want to achieve together. Personally, I have limited collaboration with the industry, but that is by choice just to make sure I have no conflict of interest. However, I collaborate a lot with colleagues and MR physicists that have connections and partnerships with the industry, and I think that is great and beneficial for all parts and something that I promote.

Chris: Any great partnership requires a shared common vision and purpose. Working collaboratively with colleagues and peers from different specialty-groups and professions is integral to the success of an MRI department. Building trust and openness while always recognizing the value and contribution of all employees is crucial.

At our facility, the radiologists, radiographers/technologists, nurses, administration team and physicists all work collaboratively to ensure that our department runs efficiently and that the patient experience and outcome is second to none. We also work closely with our research partners and vendors to realize our goals. In my opinion, a strong working relationship between the MR radiographer/technologist and MR radiologist is crucial. The radiographer/technologist must understand what it is the radiologist requires for diagnosis and must have the ability and skills to work autonomously to achieve a quality scan that will enable a diagnosis to be made. In a great partnership, the radiologist will trust in the abilities of their radiographer/technologist to perform the most suitable scan for every patient based on the clinical indication provided.

### **4. What is your favorite part about your job?**

Pia: The fruitful discussions with brilliant colleagues, reading interesting cases and watching my Ph.D. students grow and become independent. If you ask me what I do not like, it is the boring meetings that just generate new meetings and the sometimes ridiculous administration that you have to spend time on—as well as to have to fight for the value of research in a clinical environment.

Chris: The people! I enjoy interacting and engaging with staff on all different levels of the organization and across all imaging modalities. Working with a variety of people, each with different skill sets, makes my work day enjoyable. I like to mentor and train my staff to become highly skilled operators of the MRI scanner. Educating someone to interpret the clinical indication on a request form and then optimize MRI sequence parameters to produce the highest quality scan for that patient is far more valuable and rewarding than just showing someone how to push a few buttons.

## **5. What would you tell your younger self about your future in MR?**

Pia: Keep on doing what you love to do! You will have a lot to learn and a lot to investigate. I hope to go on for a few more years until retirement (maybe even after that).

Chris: Get involved from the outset and don't be intimidated by the wider MR community, be they technologists, radiologists, clinicians, researchers or physicists. We all work together and collaboratively. Every group has something essential to contribute to the field of MRI and always be confident in the knowledge that your role as an MR radiographer/technologist is just as crucial to the outcome of the scan and the result for the patient as any other. Continue to learn and develop as the field grows and expands. Your career will benefit significantly through continuing professional development, and through networking and collaborating with other MR professionals. Early involvement in the SMRT and ISMRM will give you an amazing opportunity to do this.

## **6. Why should people consider going into the MR field?**

Pia: The fast development in the field, the increasing use worldwide, the many exciting research areas ranging from sequences development, implementation both in research as well as in clinical routine. Having the opportunity to work, learn and interact with colleague's from different backgrounds. There is always a place for everyone.

Chris: MRI is a dynamic and fast-paced modality that continues to evolve. The role of the MR radiographer/technologist is multifaceted, providing an exciting opportunity to combine a knowledge of anatomy and physics with the practical skills of communication and clinical care to improve patient outcomes. Every day in MRI is a different day that will present new challenges and opportunities, and for me this is what makes MRI so unique and exciting—and never boring!

## **7. What are you looking forward to seeing or experiencing at the next annual meeting?**

Pia: As this year's president of ISMRM, I hope that everyone feels included at the Montréal meeting and that everyone will find a part of the meeting that thrills their imagination and curiosity. I want to see our members take the opportunity to interact, discuss, and meet and to build networks for future collaborations and discussions. But most important of all to have fun and enjoy the atmosphere of being at the best meeting ever—the ISMRM annual meeting & exhibition.

Chris: There is always an extensive range of exciting material to see at our annual meetings, ranging from novel research and advances in technology and scanning techniques, right through to a different take on an old topic. Meeting people that are new to the field and new to the SMRT and ISMRM is something I look forward to every year. Montréal this year will be no exception, and I look forward to the educational content that will be on offer. One of the most rewarding experiences of our annual meetings is the opportunity to re-connect and engage with old friends, colleagues, and peers at a face to face level. Regardless, of the fact that a year will have passed since our last meeting, the feeling is always like it was just yesterday when we last caught up. The SMRT and ISMRM community is global, and this fosters a unique opportunity for connecting and networking with MR professionals from various specialty groups around the world.

The ISMRM 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting & Exhibition will be held at the Le Palais Des Congrès de Montréal, in Montréal, QC, Canada. The meeting opens 11 May and will welcome over 6,000 attendees specializing in the field of magnetic resonance. If you are interested in attending, [register today](#).

#### **About ISMRM:**

The International Society for Magnetic Resonance in Medicine is an international, nonprofit, scientific association whose purpose is to promote communication, research, development, and applications in the field of magnetic resonance in medicine and biology and other related topics and to develop and provide channels and facilities for continuing education in the field. Its multidisciplinary membership of over 9,000 consists of clinicians, physicists, engineers, biochemists, and technologists. In addition to its large scientific meetings, the Society holds workshops and publishes two journals, *Magnetic Resonance in Medicine* and the *Journal of Magnetic Resonance Imaging*, and a virtual newsletter, *MR Pulse*. It also sponsors 27 study groups on specific areas of scientific interest and chapters based on geographical location.

To find out more about the International Society for Magnetic Resonance in Medicine (ISMRM), please call +1 510-841-1899, Fax +1 510-841-2340, or visit our website at [www.ismrm.org](http://www.ismrm.org).

ISMRM, One Concord Center, 2300 Clayton Road, Suite 620, Concord, CA 94520 USA

#### **About SMRT:**

The Society for MR Radiographers & Technologists (SMRT), a section of the International Society for Magnetic Resonance in Medicine (ISMRM), is committed to the professional development of radiographers and technologists from around the globe by providing specific MR education, research, and career assistance to its members. Our mission is to advance global education in the field of magnetic resonance for improved practices and patient outcomes

To find out more about the Society for MR Radiographers & Technologists (SMRT), please call +1 925-825-SMRT (7678), Fax +1 510-841-2340, or visit our website at [www.ismrm.org/smrt](http://www.ismrm.org/smrt).

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