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Real time radiation treatment planning system

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ABSTRACT

The invention relates to a real time radiation treatment planning system for use in effecting radiation therapy of a pre-selected anatomical portion of an animal body according to the preamble of claim 1.

According to the invention said processing means are provided with a three-dimensional imaging algorithm and a three-dimensional image segmentation algorithm for at least the specific organs within said anatomical portion and the needles for converting the image data obtained with said imaging means into a three-dimensional image of the anatomical portion, whereby by using at least one single or multi-objective anatomy based genetic optimization algorithm

for pre-planning or virtual simulation purposes said processing means are arranged to determine in real time the optimal number and position of at least one of said hollow needles, the position of said energy emitting source within each hollow needle as well as the dwell times of said energy emitting source at each position; whereas

for post planning purposes said processing means are arranged to determine based on three-dimensional image information in real time the real needle positions and the dwell times of said energy emitting source for each position.

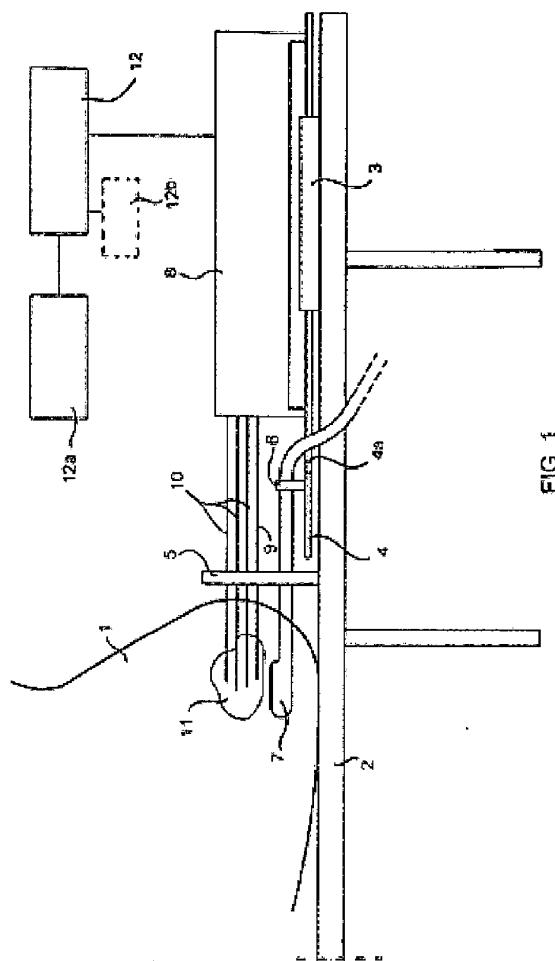


FIG. 1

REAL TIME RADIATION TREATMENT PLANNING SYSTEM.

DEFINITIONS

In the specification the term "comprising" shall be understood to have a broad meaning similar to the term "including" and will be understood to imply the inclusion of a stated integer or step or group of integers or steps but not the exclusion of any other integer or step or group of integers or steps. This definition also applies to variations on the term "comprising" such as "comprise" and "comprises".

DESCRIPTION

The invention relates to a real time radiation treatment planning system for use in effecting radiation therapy of a pre-selected anatomical portion of an animal body, comprising:

A : a stepper for automatically positioning imaging means for generating image data corresponding to the anatomical portion;

B : means for inserting under the guidance of a template at least one hollow needle at a position into said anatomical portion;

C : radiation delivery means for defining a plurality of positions having a spatial relationship within a volume of said anatomical portion and for inserting at least one energy emitting source through said at least one hollow needle at said plurality of positions into said anatomical portion;

D : processing means for generating a radiation treatment plan for effecting said radiation therapy, said treatment plan including information concerning:

- the number, position, direction and estimation of the best way of placement of one or more of said hollow needles within the anatomical portion and volume of said anatomical portion to be treated;

- the amount of radiation dose to be emitted.

The last decade has seen major changes in the way radiation treatments are delivered. The century-old objective of radiation therapy, i.e. to

deliver a curative dose to the target, e.g. a tumour, while preserving normal tissues of the animal body can now be aimed at with a high degree of sophistication. However, despite of major improvements achieved with three-dimensional imaging techniques, that allow the anatomy to be properly defined, brachytherapy treatments have not yet fully benefited from these important new pieces of information.

For brachytherapy using high dose rate (HDR) energy emitting sources, catheters or hollow needles are placed in a target volume within an animal body and it is assumed that if the dose distribution covers the catheters, it should also cover the anatomy. Imaging is commonly used to set the treatment margins, but optimized dose distributions are based on considerations, such as the catheter positions and desired dose and limited to a few defined points. This necessarily results in an approximation of the shape of the anatomical portion to be treated.

For the case of treatments of the prostate, volume optimization results in a dose distribution that is essentially cylindrically shaped. With a cylindrically shaped approximation of the prostate it is possible to assure the complete coverage of the prostate volume with the radiation emitted by the source or sources. Only a conformal dose distribution delivered to the anatomical portion with an adequate margin around the prostate will encompass all affected, cancerous tissue.

The methods described in the prior art (e.g. Etienne Lessard, Med. Phys. 28. (5), May 2001) are using the concept of inverse planning to obtain an anatomy-based optimization of the dose distribution. Without any manual modification to deliver conformal HDR prostate treatment and knowing the exact location of the applicators (catheters/hollow needles), due to modern imaging techniques, it is easy to determine the possible stopping position of the radioactive source within a catheter or hollow needle present in the animal body. The possible source positions are considered given. The system has to determine based on a HDR inverse planning dose optimization governed entirely from anatomy and clinical criteria to decide the best dwell time distribution.

In United States Patent No. 5,391,139 in the name of G.K. Edmundson a real time radiation treatment planning system according to the preamble is disclosed. With this system image data of the anatomical portion, e.g. the prostate is obtained for planning purposes and the medical personnel chooses an arbitrary number of needle locations using predetermined placement rules, which have been empirically determined from experience. The planning system develops a treatment plan based on these arbitrary needle positions after which the medical personnel has to examine the planning results and decide whether these results are suitable for performing the actual radiation treatment. In case the medical personnel finds the planning results unsatisfactorily the virtual needle positions have to be altered and using the repositioned needles a new treatment plan is generated. This trial-and-error approach is repeated until a treatment plan is developed that satisfies the actual intended radiation treatment.

Subsequently the catheters or needles are inserted via a template into the animal body according to the generated treatment plan.

Conventional dose optimization algorithms are single objective, i.e. they provide a single solution. This solution is found by a trial-and-error search method as in Edmundson's U.S. Patent No. 5,391,139, by modifying importance factors of a weighted sum of objectives, e.g. by repositioning the virtual needles or by changing the radiation dose to be delivered. This problem has been addressed currently and some methods have been proposed to find an optimal set of importance factors.

Conventional optimization methods combine the target objectives and the objectives for the surrounding healthy tissue and of critical structures into a single weighted objective function. The weight or importance factor for each objective must be supplied. The obtained solution depends on the value of importance factors used. One goal of a treatment planning system is the ability to assist the clinician in obtaining good plans on the fly. Also it should provide all the information of the possibilities given the objectives of the treatment. In order to explore the feasible region of the solution space with respect to each objective, different values for the importance factors in the aggregate objective function must

be given.

Furthermore, the appropriate values of these importance factors differ from clinical case to clinical case. This implies that for any new clinical case a lot of effort is necessary for their determination.

While current optimization methods are single weighted objective methods the dose optimization problem is a true multi-objective problem and therefore multi-objective optimization methods should be used.

The gradient-based algorithm due to its efficiency allows the construction of the so-called Pareto or trade-off surface which contains all the information of the competition between the objectives which is necessary for the planner to select the solution which best fulfills his requirements.

One problem of this algorithm is that the weighted sum as used in all conventional dose optimization algorithms cannot provide solutions in possible non-convex parts of the Pareto tradeoff surface, because a convex weighted sum of objectives converges only to the convex parts of the Pareto front. Another major limitation of the algorithm is its restriction to convex objective functions for which gradients can be calculated. In this case according to the Kuhn-Tucker theorems a global optimum can be obtained and the entire Pareto front is accessible from the weighted sum.

When searching for an optimal set of importance factors dividing each importance factors in n points, then the number of combinations for k objectives is approximately proportional to n^{k-1} and the shape of the entire trade-off surface require a very large computational time. Most realistic problems require the simultaneous optimization of many objectives. It is unlikely that all objectives are optimal for a single set of parameters. If this is so, then there exist many, in principle infinite solutions.

A multi-objective algorithm does not provide a single solution, but a representative set of all possible solutions. Out of these representative solutions a single final solution has to be selected. It is a complex problem to automatically select such a solution and such methods have been proposed but then a planner would not know what alternatives solutions could instead be selected. In problems

where different sets of objectives have to be compared this information is valuable, since it shows the possibilities a planner has for each such set.

A time analysis of the optimization with available commercial systems based on e.g. 35 clinical cases shows that even if a single optimization run requires only a few seconds the actual optimization requires 5.74.8 minutes. The evaluation of the results requires additional 5.82.5 minutes. This shows that the result of a single optimization run is not always satisfactorily and most of the time is spent in a manual trial-and-error optimization.

The invention aims to obviate the above described problems and proposes a new real time radiation treatment planning system according to the above preamble, where the possible positions of the energy emitting sources are not considered given and the location of the needles are not predetermined based on rules, which have been empirically determined.

In a further aspect of the present invention a new real time radiation treatment planning system and method is proposed, which will allow a significant speed-up of single and multi-objective anatomy based dose optimization and inverse planning procedures for HDR interstitial brachytherapy.

More in particular the invention aims to generate in real time a treatment plan, which will be presented to the medical personnel instantly and can also immediately used as the radiation treatment.

According to the invention said processing means are provided with a three-dimensional imaging algorithm and a three-dimensional image segmentation algorithm for at least the specific organs within said anatomical portion and the needles for converting the image data obtained with said imaging means into a three-dimensional image of the anatomical portion, whereby by using at least one single or multi-objective anatomy based genetic optimization algorithm for pre-planning or virtual simulation purposes said processing means are arranged to determine in real time the optimal number and position of at least one of said hollow needles, the position of said energy emitting source within each hollow needle as well as the dwell times of said energy emitting source at each position; whereas for post planning purposes said processing means are arranged

to determine based on three-dimensional image information in real time the real needle positions and the dwell times of said energy emitting source for each position.

The term needles in this application also covers e.g. catheters, guide tubes or other elements to be implanted in an animal body for positioning an energy emitting source inside that animal body. The three-dimensional image segmentation algorithm used in the treatment planning system according to the invention may use all or part of these elements (hollow needles, catheters, and guide tubes, e.g.).

The use of a three-dimensional imaging algorithm and a three-dimensional image segmentation algorithm allows a real time and fast generation of a treatment plan without the necessity of determining certain objectives as a starting point for the treatment planning step, such as the positioning of one or more needle inside the anatomical portion.

In fact with the treatment planning system according to the invention for generating a treatment plan said anatomy based genetic optimization algorithm uses specific animal body related data and/or system related data and/or radiation related data, wherein said animal body related data are data concerning the shape and localization of said anatomical portion and/or the shape and localization of specific organs near or within said anatomical portion.

Said system related data may be data concerning the template and its position in relation to said anatomical portion of said animal body and/or the dimensions of the needles used and/or the minimum displacement distance of said energy emitting source through said radiation delivery means, whereas said radiation related data are data concerning the prescribed radiation dose to said anatomical portion of said animal body, the maximum radiation exposure dose to said specific organs near or within said anatomical portion.

These specific data are used as boundary conditions and entered into the anatomy based genetic optimization algorithm by the medical personnel or determined/established by said algorithm from e.g. said image data obtained with the imaging means.

Dose optimization has to consider many objectives in conflict, such as the coverage of the pre-selected anatomical portion or planning target volume (PTV) to be treated with a specified dose and the dose protection of the surrounding tissue and specific delicate organs (OAR = organs at risk), such as the bladder and urethra, when treating prostate cancer. The objectives are combined into a single objective function f_{Tot} formed by a weighted sum of the individual objective functions. The optimal value f^* for the i^{th} objective found by a optimization algorithm depends on the weights (importance factors) used and may not be the best possible result as the mapping from importance to objective space is complex, especially for three and more objectives. In cases where the solution is not satisfactory the treatment planner is required to repeat the optimization with a different set of importance factors. One method is to increase the importance factors of the objectives for which the solution does not provide a satisfactory result.

Practical only a very small number of combinations can be tested and with this approach the treatment planner cannot gain all the information about the range of possible values and the degree of competition, which are required to select the "best solution". In order to get the "best" possible result avoiding trial-and-error methods the invention proposes and uses a gradient based multi-objective optimization algorithm.

The importance of this has been recognized by the United States Patent No. 6,327,490, where a method is presented to save and compare different treatment plans. What is not recognized in this patent is that not only a modification of the energy emitting source positions is sometimes necessary, but also a modification of the importance factors/boundary conditions, which determine the quality of the solution. In clinical practice the reality is often that the optimization required is multi-objective rather than single-objective and this increases even further the time required for the calculation process. Consequently there is a real need in anatomy based optimization techniques and inverse planning procedures for very fast dose calculation methods.

The dose $d_i(x)$ at the i^{th} sampling point is calculated by:

$$d_i(x) = \sum_{j=1}^{N_d} x_j^2 \tilde{d}_{ij}$$

where N_d is the number of sources, x_j^2 is the dwell time of the j^{th} source dwell position \tilde{d}_{ij} and the kernel value for the i^{th} dose calculation point and j^{th} source dwell position. Dose calculation look-up tables (LUT) of \tilde{d}_{ij} are calculated and stored in a preprocessing step. The calculation of the dose for N_s sampling points requires $N_s N_d$ multiplications and $N_s(N_s-1)$ additions.

A Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) based convolution technique for the calculation of a three-dimensional dose distribution has been proposed by Boyer and Mok in 1986, which tries to reduce the calculation time. Employing FFT based convolution methods the time needed for the calculation of a dose distribution with this method is independent of the number of sources. While unable to cope with angular asymmetric kernels, an advantage of the FFT based method is that the computational time is practically independent of the form of the dosimetric kernel used. Our analysis has shown that this method is comparable with conventional methods only if the number of sources is much larger than 300. The avoidance of wrap around effects can only be avoided with zero padding in each dimension which increases the transform size to $N = 8 \cdot N_s$ for N_s sampling points and requires $8 \cdot N_s \cdot \ln(8 \cdot N_s)$ operations.

The aim of HDR brachytherapy dose optimization according to the invention is to cover the anatomical portion (PTV) to be treated with at least some dose value, and to protect the specific delicate organs (OAR) and the surrounding normal tissue with dose values above some specific level. For variance based objective functions dose values above a critical dose value are penalized quadratic. The objectives are such that the isodose of the optimal dose distribution of the prescription dose coincides with the surface of the anatomical portion. With this approach, the use of an additional objective for the surrounding normal tissue is not necessary. For this the dose variance f_s of the sampling points (dose points) as uniformly distributed on the surface of the anatomical portion should be as

small as possible. The avoidance of excessive high dose values inside the anatomical portion, e.g. the prostate is controlled by the dose distribution variance f_s inside the anatomical portion.

Normalized variances are used:

$$f_s = \frac{1}{N_s} \sum_{i=1}^{N_s} \frac{(d_i^s - m_s)^2}{m_s^2}, \quad f_v = \frac{1}{N_v} \sum_{i=1}^{N_v} \frac{(d_i^v - m_v)^2}{m_v^2}$$

where m_s and m_v are the average dose values on the surface of the anatomical portion and within the anatomical portion respectively, and N_s , N_v the corresponding numbers of sampling points. The objective space of (f_s, f_v) is convex and gradient-based algorithms converge to the global Pareto front. If specific, delicate organs are to be considered then an additional objective is included for each specific organ (OAR):

$$f_{OAR} = \frac{1}{N_{OAR}} \sum_{i=1}^{N_{OAR}} \Theta(d_i^{OAR} - D_c^{OAR} m_s) (d_i^{OAR} - D_c^{OAR} m_s)^2, \quad \Theta(x) = \begin{cases} 1 & x \geq 0 \\ 0 & x < 0 \end{cases}$$

where N_{OAR} is the number of sampling points in the specific organ and D_c^{OAR} is the corresponding critical dose as a fraction of the prescription dose or reference dose, which dose equals in this model the average dose on the surface of the anatomical portion. The objective functions for the specific delicate organs are of the same form as for the anatomical organs, but involve the dose variances versus the critical dose values, which are specific only to those particular specific organs. The derivatives are:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial f_s}{\partial x_k} &= \frac{4x_k}{N_s m_s^3} \sum_{i=1}^{N_s} d_i^s (m_s \tilde{d}_{ik}^s - d_i^s \tilde{m}_k^s) \\ \frac{\partial f_v}{\partial x_k} &= \frac{4x_k}{N_v m_v^3} \sum_{i=1}^{N_v} d_i^v (m_v \tilde{d}_{ik}^v - d_i^v \tilde{m}_k^v) \\ \frac{\partial f_{OAR}}{\partial x_k} &= \frac{4x_k}{N_{OAR} (D_c^{OAR})^2 m_s^3} \sum_{i=1}^{N_{OAR}} \Theta(d_i^{OAR} - D_c^{OAR} m_s) (d_i^{OAR} - D_c^{OAR} m_s) (m_s \tilde{d}_{ik}^{OAR} - d_i^{OAR} \tilde{m}_k^s) \end{aligned}$$

Where the following relations are used:

$$\begin{aligned}
 d_i^s &= \sum_{l=1}^{N_d} x_l^2 \tilde{d}_{il}^s, \quad m_s = \frac{1}{N_s} \sum_{l=1}^{N_s} d_l^s, \quad \bar{m}_k^s = \frac{1}{N_s} \sum_{l=1}^{N_s} \tilde{d}_{lk}^s, \quad k=1, \dots, N_d \\
 d_i^v &= \sum_{l=1}^{N_d} x_l^2 \tilde{d}_{il}^v, \quad m_v = \frac{1}{N_v} \sum_{l=1}^{N_v} d_l^v, \quad \bar{m}_k^v = \frac{1}{N_v} \sum_{l=1}^{N_v} \tilde{d}_{lk}^v, \quad k=1, \dots, N_d \\
 d_i^{OAR} &= \sum_{l=1}^{N_d} x_l^2 \tilde{d}_{il}^{OAR}
 \end{aligned}$$

where d_i^s , d_i^v and d_i^{OAR} is the dose rate at the i^{th} sampling point on the surface of the anatomical portion, within the anatomical portion and within a specific organ respectively. \tilde{d}_{il}^s , \tilde{d}_{il}^v , \tilde{d}_{il}^{OAR} is the dose kernel for the i^{th} sampling point and the l^{th} source dwell position for the sampling points on the surface of the anatomical portion, within the anatomical portion and in the specific organ respectively. N_d is the number of source dwell positions.

For a conventional method to calculate objective values and derivatives the lookup table \tilde{d}_{il}^s as a $N_s \times N_d$ matrix \tilde{K}^s are considered:

$$\tilde{K}^s = \begin{pmatrix} \tilde{d}_{11}^s & \tilde{d}_{12}^s & \cdots & \tilde{d}_{1N_d}^s \\ \tilde{d}_{21}^s & \tilde{d}_{22}^s & \cdots & \tilde{d}_{2N_d}^s \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ \tilde{d}_{N_s 1}^s & \tilde{d}_{N_s 2}^s & \cdots & \tilde{d}_{N_s N_d}^s \end{pmatrix}$$

If $\tilde{d}^{sT} = (d_{11}^s, d_{12}^s, \dots, d_{1N_d}^s)$ is the vector of dose values d_i^s and $\tilde{t}^T = (t_1, t_2, \dots, t_{N_d}) = (x_1^2, x_2^2, \dots, x_{N_d}^2)$ the vector of the dwell times, then $\tilde{d}^s = \tilde{K}^s \tilde{t}$.

The conventional approach is to calculate the dose values and then the objective values and their derivatives. The number of operations to calculate \tilde{d}^s requires $N_d \cdot N_s$ multiplications and $(N_d - 1) \cdot N_s$ additions. The storage required for \tilde{K}^s is $N_d \cdot N_s$ floating points. The storage of this pre-computed matrix is desired because of the significant gain in the optimization speed. The calculation of the objective functions and the derivatives for N_s sampling points and N_d source dwell positions requires therefore an order of $N_d \cdot N_s$ operations.

The New method of the calculation of the objectives and derivatives using

dose kernel look-up tables.

The objective function f_s and its N_d derivatives can be written also

as:

$$f_s = \left[\frac{1}{N_s m_s^2} \sum_{i=1}^{N_s} (d_i^s)^2 \right] - 1 \quad \frac{\partial f_s}{\partial x_k} = \frac{4x_k}{N_s m_s^2} \sum_{i=1}^{N_s} d_i^s \tilde{d}_{ik}^s + \frac{4x_k \tilde{m}_k^s}{N_s m_s^3} \sum_{i=1}^{N_s} (d_i^s)^2 \quad k = 1, 2, \dots, N_d$$

It is possible to reduce the number of operations of the objective value and its derivatives to approximately $O(N_d N_d)$ operations.

With $d^{sT} = \bar{t}^T K^{sT}$ we have $\sum_{i=1}^{N_s} (d_i^s)^2 = d^{sT} \cdot d^s = \bar{t}^T K^{sT} K^s \bar{t} = \bar{t}^T D^s \bar{t}$. D^s is a symmetric

($D_{\alpha\beta}^s = D_{\beta\alpha}^s$) $N_d \times N_d$ matrix. We call K^s the first order and D^s the second order dose kernel matrix.

The terms m_s , m_s^2 and $\sum_{i=1}^{N_s} d_i^s \tilde{d}_{i\beta}^s$ can be calculated from K^s using

the relations:

$$m_s = \bar{s}^{sT} K^s \bar{t}$$

$$m_s^2 = \bar{t}^T K^{sT} \bar{s}^s \bar{s}^{sT} K^s \bar{t} = \bar{t}^T \bar{m}^s \bar{m}^{sT} \bar{t}$$

$$\sum_{i=1}^{N_s} d_i^s \tilde{d}_{i\beta}^s = \left(\bar{s}^{sT} K^s \right)_{\beta}$$

where $\bar{s}^{sT} = \frac{1}{N_s} (1, 1, 1, \dots, 1)$ is a N_s dimensional vector and $\bar{m}^{sT} = \bar{s}^{sT} K^s$.

From the matrix representation the following terms can be written analytically as:

$$g_{\alpha} \equiv \sum_{i=1}^{N_s} d_i^s \tilde{d}_{i\alpha}^s = \sum_{\beta=1}^{N_d} x_{\beta}^2 D_{\alpha\beta}^s \quad (1)$$

$$\sum_{i=1}^{N_s} (d_i^s)^2 = \sum_{\alpha=1}^{N_d} \sum_{\beta=1}^{N_d} x_{\alpha}^2 x_{\beta}^2 D_{\alpha\beta}^s = \sum_{\alpha=1}^{N_d} x_{\alpha}^2 \sum_{\beta=1}^{N_d} x_{\beta}^2 D_{\alpha\beta}^s = \sum_{\alpha=1}^{N_d} x_{\alpha}^2 g_{\alpha} \quad (2)$$

$$m_s = \sum_{\alpha=1}^{N_s} x_\alpha^2 \bar{m}_\alpha^s \quad (3)$$

where $D_{\alpha\beta}^s = \sum_{i=1}^{N_s} \bar{d}_{i\alpha}^s \bar{d}_{i\beta}^s$. For the objective f_v the corresponding matrices \bar{K}^v and D^v are required. D^s and D^v can be calculated once in a preprocessing step which requires only 1-2 seconds.

The equations (1)-(3) show us that it is possible to increase the number of sampling points in the anatomical portion without increasing the optimization time as the right side of each equation does not directly depend on the number of sampling points. This means that we can increase accuracy without increasing the computation costs.

With the new approach the number of operations is independent on the number of sampling points. It is not necessary to store the matrix \bar{K}^s and \bar{K}^v . Only the matrices D^s , D^v and the N_d dimensional vectors $\bar{K}^{sT} \bar{s}^s$ and $\bar{K}^{vT} \bar{s}^v$ are required for the dose optimization. The matrices \bar{K}^s and \bar{K}^v require $N_s N_d$ and $N_v N_d$ numbers to be stored, whereas both symmetric matrices D^s and D^v require $N_d(N_d+1)$ numbers to be stored, i.e. the storage is independent on the number of sampling points.

It is of importance to mention that this novel algorithm can be applied in general for objectives (and their derivatives) of the following types commonly used in brachytherapy (HDR and seeds) and external beam radiotherapy:

$$f_1 = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N (d_i - D_i)^2 \quad (4)$$

$$f_2 = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N d_i \quad (5)$$

$$f_3 = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N d_i^2 \quad (6)$$

where D_i is the desired dose for the i^{th} sampling point and N the number of sampling points. Objectives of the form f_2 and f_3 are used for the

surrounding normal tissue, where the dose has to be minimized. f_2 is a measure of the integral dose, whereas with f_3 high dose values are penalized stronger than with f_2 .

For external beam radiotherapy and intensity modulated beam radiotherapy (IMRT) due to the sparse matrix nature of the kernel matrix we have a benefit only if the sampling point density is such that the average number of sampling points per beamlet is larger than the number of beamlets.

Furthermore, it is to mention that since the kernel of an inverse planning system is based on the calculation of anatomy related objective functions, it is obvious that the same benefit is expected when this novel method is implemented as described in the Equations 1 to 3 above.

In order to optimize for the specific organ's the objective function and the derivatives are build up only by terms for which $d_i^{OAR} > D_c^{OAR} m_s$, which is expressed by $\Theta(d_i^{OAR} - D_c^{OAR} m_s)$. A large fraction of the sampling points has dose values that are smaller than $D_c^{OAR} m_s$. It is possible to avoid the calculation of a fraction of these dose values using the Cauchy-Schwarz-Bunjakovski inequality:

$$\sum_{i=1}^N a_i b_i \leq \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^N a_i^2} \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^N b_i^2}$$

For the dose d_i of the i^{th} sampling point we have

$$d_i = \sum_{l=1}^{N_s} x_l^2 \tilde{d}_{il} \leq \sqrt{\sum_{l=1}^{N_s} x_l^4} \sqrt{\sum_{l=1}^{N_s} \tilde{d}_{il}^2}$$

The quantity $r = \sqrt{\sum_{l=1}^{N_s} x_l^4}$ is calculated only once in each iteration

while the N_s constants $p_i = \sqrt{\sum_{l=1}^{N_s} \tilde{d}_{il}^2}, i=1, \dots, N_s$ can be calculated and stored in a pre-processing step. If $r \cdot p_i < D_c^{OAR} m_s$ it follows $d_i < D_c^{OAR} m_s$, otherwise it is necessary to calculate d_i . Even if the estimation of the dose by the inequality is not very good it is possible to avoid the calculation of the dose values of a large fraction of the sampling points in the specific organs using only one multiplication

per point.

A better estimate can be obtained using the relation:

$$d_i = \sum_{l=1}^{N_d} x_l^2 d_l \leq \sqrt{\sum_{l=1}^{N_d} x_l^4} \sqrt{\sum_{l=1}^{N_d} d_l^2} + \sqrt{\sum_{l=N_d+1}^{N_d} x_l^4} \sqrt{\sum_{l=N_d+1}^{N_d} d_l^2} \leq \sqrt{\sum_{l=1}^{N_d} x_l^4} \sqrt{\sum_{l=1}^{N_d} d_l^2}, \quad i=1, \dots, N_s$$

where N_d is divided into 2 approximately equal terms N_1, N_2 , i.e. $N_d = N_1 + N_2$.

The two terms $\sqrt{\sum_{l=1}^{N_d} x_l^4}$ and $\sqrt{\sum_{l=N_d+1}^{N_d} x_l^4}$ can be calculated in each

iteration once while the $2N_s$ terms $\sqrt{\sum_{l=1}^{N_d} d_l^2}$ and $\sqrt{\sum_{l=N_d+1}^{N_d} d_l^2}$ are calculate once and stored in a pre processing step before the optimization.

This method can be extended to objective functions of the type

$$f_H(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \Theta(d_i(\mathbf{x}) - D_H)(d_i(\mathbf{x}) - D_H)^\alpha$$

For $\alpha=2$ we obtain the quadratic type of objectives, for $\alpha=1$ the Lessard-Pouliot objectives and for $\alpha=0$ the DVH based objectives. Using the inequality we can avoid the calculation of the dose of a fraction of the sampling points if $r \cdot p_i < D_H$. For the rectum, bladder and normal tissue this approach avoids the calculation of a significant fraction of the dose values.

The main idea of the proposed dose optimization speed-up method is that the objective functions presented here and commonly used in brachytherapy and their derivatives can be calculated without the calculation of the individual dose values or a fraction of them. For objectives of the type given by equation (4)-(6) the number of operations for the calculation of the objective function values and their derivatives is independent of the number of sampling points, if we ignore the pre processing time to calculate and store $\mathbf{s}^{s^T} \mathbf{K}^s$ and $D^s = \mathbf{s}^{s^T} \mathbf{K}^s$.

This method allows us to increase the number of sampling points in the anatomical portion up to a few thousands, improving thus the accuracy without any loss of optimization speed. In comparison to standard dose optimization the new method is faster the more sampling points we have. The

speed-up is also significant for implants with a small number of source dwell positions, where the term N_d^2 is much smaller than $N_s \cdot N_d$ required previously for the calculation of the dose values.

A multi-objective optimization with 100 sources using up to 100 solutions and up to 5000 sampling points in the anatomical portion with a 2 GHz PC is possible in less than 10 s. The storage for N_s sampling points and N_d sources can be reduced by a factor of approximately $2N_s/N_d$.

A speed-up is expected not only for deterministic algorithms but also for stochastic algorithms such as genetic algorithms or simulated annealing.

For high dose limits objectives an estimation of the dose value using only two multiplications and one addition per sampling point avoids the necessity of the calculation of the dose value of a fraction of the sampling points.

Figure 1 shows in very schematic form various elements of a known device for implanting an energy emitting source, e.g. radioactive seeds into a prostate gland. A patient 1 is shown lying in lithotomy position on a table 2. Fixedly connected to the table 2 is a housing 3. Housing 3 comprises a drive means 4 to move rod 4a stepwise. A template 5 is connected or mounted to the table 2, which template is provided (not shown) with a plurality of guiding holes through which holes hollow needles 9, 10 can be positioned relative to the patient. By means of a holder 6 a transrectal imaging probe 7 is fixedly connected to said rod 4a, which is moveable in a direction towards and from the patient by means of the drive means 4. The imaging probe 7 can be an ultrasound probe.

A needle 9 is used for fixing the prostate gland 11 in position relative to the template 5. A number of needles 10 is fixed into position through the template 5 in the prostate gland 11. The template 5 determines the relative positions of the needles 10 in two dimensions. The needles 10 are open at their distal ends and are sealed off by a plug of bio-compatible, preferably bio-absorbable wax. In said housing 3 a seed loading unit 8 is present.

A well-known therapy planning module 12a is provided for determining the number and relative positions of seeds in each needle for implantation in the prostate gland 11. Such therapy planning module 12a usually

comprises a computer programmed with a therapy planning program. The therapy planning module 12a is connected to the seed loading unit 8 through a control device 12 for controlling the number of seeds for each needle. Control device 12 may be a separate device or may be an integrated part either of the seed loading unit 8 or of the therapy planning module 12a or may be embodied in the software of the therapy planning module 12a or of the seed loading unit 8.

The known device shown in Fig. 1 operates as follows. A patient 1 is under spinal or general anesthesia and lies on the operating table 2 in lithotomy position. The (ultrasound) imaging probe 7 is introduced into the rectum and the probe is connected via signal line 7a with a well known image screen, where an image may be seen of the inside of the patient in particular of the prostate gland 11 as seen from the point of view of the imaging probe 7. The template 5 is attached to the drive means 4, thereby insuring the correlation of the ultrasound image geometry and the template 5. The prostate gland 11 is fixed relative to the template 5 and the drive means 4 and the imaging probe 7 by means of one or more needles 9, 10. Subsequently further needles 10 are introduced in the body and the prostate gland under ultrasound guidance one by one.

Moving the imaging probe with the drive means 4 longitudinally within the rectum controls the needle depths of each needle 10. After all needles 10 have been placed, their positions relative to the prostate gland 11 are determined in at least one of several known ways. In a known way the therapy planning module 12a determines how the needles 10 are to be placed in the prostate and how many radioactive seeds are to be placed in what order in each of the needles 10. The information about the desired placement of the radioactive seeds in the needles 10 is used to control the seed loading unit 8.

According to the invention said therapy treatment planning module generates at least one treatment plan as it is provided with a three-dimensional imaging algorithm and a three-dimensional image segmentation algorithm for the specific organs within said anatomical portion, the needles and the tubes for converting the image data obtained with said imaging means into a three-dimensional image of the anatomical portion, whereby by using at least one single

or multi-objective anatomy based genetic optimization algorithm for pre-planning or virtual simulation purposes said processing means are arranged to determine in real time the optimal number and position of at least one of said hollow needles, the position of said energy emitting source within each hollow needle as well as the dwell times of said energy emitting source at each position; whereas for post planning purposes said processing means are arranged to determine based on three-dimensional image information in real time the real needle positions and the dwell times of said energy emitting source for each position.

In Figure 2 a template is disclosed for use in a real time radiation treatment planning system according to the invention. Especially the template 20 is detachable from a template frame 25, which frame is connected with the stepper means for displacing the imaging means as described in connection with Figure 1.

According to the invention template 20 has a grid configuration with needle holes 22 at an intermediate distance of 3.5 mm seen in diagonal direction. In another embodiment the template has a grid configuration with needle holes at an intermediate distance of 2.5 mm seen in orthogonal direction.

In a specific embodiment the template is a motorized template without holes and the needles are guided with a guiding tube, whereas the guiding tube can be positioned in each position of the virtual template grid. As this embodiment does not use holes, the absence of a grid does not limit the positioning of the needles in relation to the template and the anatomical portion to be treated. In fact with a template without holes the grid configuration is only limited to the diameter of the needles used.

A more specific embodiment of the template is disclosed in Figure 2, where said template 20 is detachable from the frame 25. Frame 25 is connected with the stepper means as described above. For a good connection and orientation of the frame 25 and template 20 in relation to the device of Figure 1 the frame 25 is provided with alignment pins 27 which cooperate with corresponding openings (not shown) in the device of Figure 1.

The template 20 has a saddle shaped body 20a, which fits with the frame 25 as shown in Figure 2. For alignment purposes the template 20 is

provided with notches 11a-11b which cooperate with corresponding holes 26a-26b present in the circumference of frame 25.

In a further aspect of the invention the catheters or needles inserted in the body are described, through which the HDR source is travelling with their real geometrical dimensions. As a direct result of this in a subsequent aspect of the invention sampling points for dose evaluation, which are lying inside the needles or catheters are excluded. This will contribute to the reduction of the number of sampling points in the anatomical portion compared with other conventional methods and to the increase of the speed.

As shown in Figure 3 a catheter or hollow needle is defined by catheter describing points. These points are connected with cylinders and at each catheter describing lengths and diameters. The set of catheters cylinders and spheres are used to describe the geometry of a catheter that may be either metallic linear or plastic and curved.

For generating each treatment plan the processing means of the radiation treatment planning system according to the invention are arranged to generate a set of multiple sampling points using said three-dimensional imaging algorithm and said three-dimensional image segmentation algorithm and to calculate the optimal radiation dose distribution for each of said sampling points by using a gradient-based algorithm.

The quality of the results depends on the distribution of the sampling points as generated. According to the invention the dose distribution inside the anatomical portion (PTV), critical structures, such as specific delicate organs (OAR) and the surface of the anatomical portion is estimated from the dose of a small number of points (sampling points).

As shown in Figure 4 and 5 the generated sampling points are distributed on the contours and on the triangulated surface of the anatomical portion to be treated. For the contour based method no points are on both ends of the anatomical portion. Therefore a large part of the surface is undefined for the optimization algorithm and the resulting isodose is bounded only by the contours of the anatomical portion.

Sampling points in the volume are generated from low discrepancy sequences or quasi-random distributed sampling points.

In a further aspect of the invention voids and clustering are avoided in contrast to pseudo-random distributed sampling points. Monte-Carlo generated quantities converge much more rapidly than a conventional pseudo-random sequence. Sampling points inside catheters are excluded. This reduces the influence of very large dose values of sampling points that occasionally are produced very close to the source dwell positions. Statistical values obtained from the sampling points are calculated therefore with a higher accuracy.

According to the invention two treatment planning steps are performed:

Pre-planning or inverse planning: Given the geometry of the anatomical portion (PTV) to be treated, the specific organs (OAR) near or within said anatomical portion, a template and its position the optimal number and position of needles, the dwell positions and the dwell times of the energy emitting source are determined, so that the resulting dose distribution satisfies various criteria such as coverage of the anatomical portion with the prescription dose, avoidance of dose values above some critical values in the specific organs, etc.

Postplanning: Given the geometry of the anatomical portion (PTV) and the specific organs (OAR) and a given number and position of needles and the position of the energy emitting source in each needle the dwell times of the energy emitting source at each position are determined, so that the resulting dose distribution satisfies various criteria such as coverage of the anatomical portion with the prescription dose, avoidance of dose values above some critical values in the specific organs, etc.

Template based Inverse Planning

Figure 6 defines the template and catheter characteristics. The planning software is run on a personal computer or laptop computer and allows the setting of certain objectives/boundaries/parameters prior to the generation of a treatment plan. The displacement step of the source within a needle is set at 5.0

mm in the afterloader parameters, since a 2.5 mm value produces a large number of sources and the optimization using the algorithm according to the invention may take more time and since then 512 MB RAM are recommended. By pressing the button Auto-activation the dialog of Figure 7 appears, which may contain other organs (or VOIS i.e. Volumes Of Interest)

This dialog is used for the auto-activation algorithm. The anatomical organ (PTV) and the specific organs (OAR) to be protected against too much radiation exposure are listed as well as the minimum distance of the source dwell positions from the corresponding VOI in mm. It is used to select only source dwell positions that are at a distance to a corresponding VOI larger than a specified value.

VOIs for which the corresponding button is pressed only will be considered. In this example the rectum is ignored since it is outside the anatomical portion (PTV).

Now the program moves all catheters/needles, which inside the anatomical portion taking the specific organs and the geometry of the anatomical portion into account. The user has now to take only a subset of these catheters. In principle this will be done automatically by using an optimization methods which are flexible and robust. This will be the true inverse planning.

In Figure 8 the **Source Parameter** dialog for setting the prescription dose is disclosed. This dialog is used to define the source strength or activity and the prescription dose. These parameters have to be supplied for the use of the optimization algorithms. The source is characterized by its strength in units of U or as activity in units of GBq or Ci. The prescription dose is specified in cGy.

Subsequently the **Inverse planning** dialog of Figure 9 and Figure 10 **Template View and Loading** appears. Figure 10 shows the grid of the template, the catheters and VOIs at various distances from the template. The selected catheters are shown in dark. The catheters which can be selected in light gray. By moving the z-slide a plane parallel is moved along the normal to the template and at some given distance from the template defined by distance z. In

the **Template View** the intersection of the VOIs with that plane is shown in the anatomy window.

By selecting one of the buttons shown in Figure 11 (and Figure 10) the catheter density can be selected.

By selecting with the mouse cursor one or more of the catheters or needles (except those which are light gray) the selected catheter can be switched on or off. So the user can select the catheters he wants to use during treatment planning. For example a set of catheters on the periphery and an additional set of catheters inside the anatomical portion can be selected. It is preferred to limit the number of selected catheters or needles to 15-20 in order to limit the number of calculations to be performed.

Subsequently the dialog of Figure 12 **Geometry and sampling** appears which contains information about the sampling points, the number of source dwell positions and the number of catheters. Subsequently a optimization modus has to be selected and the dialog of Figure 13 appears. Here the optimization method can be selected e.g. a deterministic optimization method.

After selecting **Set Optimization Options** in Figure 13 the dialog of Figure 14 appears. The specific organs (OAR=Organ At Risk) which are to be considered during the radiation treatment planning have to be selected. In this case the rectum is located outside the anatomical region to be treated and it can be ignored. However in this example prostate cancer is to be treated and therefore the **Urethra** button is selected as the urethra is present inside the prostate. The critical dose value to which the specific organ may be exposed to as fraction of the prescription dose. In this case it is decided by the medical personnel that the urethra does not receive more than 50% of the prescription dose. Therefore the factor 1.50 is entered.

With this dialog a single or multi-objective optimization can be performed. The multi-objective optimization is selected. After the optimization 20 solutions are presented to the user (medic personnel) of the treatment planning system. The treatment planning system Plato developed and commercialized by the present applicant Nucletron B.V. or other systems use a single set of

importance factors which is not recommended because there can not be such a single set of importance factors for all cases. There is not a single solution but in principle infinite solutions.

The treatment planning system according to the invention tries to produce a representative set of multiple treatment planning solutions. The deterministic method is the most simple approach. Recommended is of course the evolutionary algorithm which is more flexible and produces much more solutions out of which the best for each case can be found. It is not always possible to have similar results. Even if only prostate cases are considered.

After initialization the treatment planning system of the invention calculates the volumes of the anatomical portion and the specific organs, it generates the sampling points and look-up tables are filled. In this case the optimization algorithm repeats 20 times with 20 different sets of importance factors.

After the optimization step the **Decision** button has to be selected in order to select a solution and see the results. The dialog of Figure 15 appears. When the button **Show results of all solutions** is pressed the dialog of Figure 16 appears. By moving the slider to the DVH values are made visible, as these values are used in the decision making of the final treatment plan.

By selecting the column the DVH(1.500) urethra, the values in that column are sorted in descending order. See Figure 18.

In Figure 18 the best radiation dose coverage of the anatomical portion (PTV) is in this example 92.13%, while 10.785% of the urethra receives a dose value above 1.5 times the prescription dose. If the medic personnel want a dose exposure of the urethra below 1% (in Figure 18 0.77%), then the best coverage for the anatomical portion (prostate) is 86.115%. By pressing the **Histogram** button the distributions e.g. are displayed (Figure 19).

The deterministic algorithms use a mean on the dose normalization for the surface of the anatomical portion and it is therefore not as flexible as the evolutionary algorithms. But the examples still show the differences between the treatment planning solutions obtained with different importance

factors/boundary conditions, which can be quite large. So one method would be to consider first the specific organs (OARs), then the dose coverage of the anatomical portion (PTV) and finally the dose in the surrounding tissue. Whatever the preferences of the planner are the algorithm according to the invention generates all possible solutions and the planner can select which treatment solution is the best solution.

In the event that it is decided that 1% of urethra may to receive more than the critical dose value, then the treatment solution no. 15 is selected in Figure 20 (see also Figure 16 and 18). When the solution 15 in the list is selected the **Accept single solution** button is to be pressed and for seeing the isodose distributions the **Iso-Dose of Selected Solution** button is to be pressed in Figure 20.

By selecting the **3D** button in Figure 21 the isodose values are marked, which are to be displayed (here the isodose for 1x the prescription and 2x the prescription). Subsequently two 3D isodose distributions will be displayed.

Post Implant Optimization

Post Implant Optimization assumes that the source dwell positions are given. This is in principle what Nucletrons PLATO systems calls inverse planning. After activating the Post Implant Optimization the treatment planning system loads the VOIS and catheters and the **Autoactivation** dialog of Figure 22 appears.

After pressing the **OK** button the **Source parameters** dialog of Figure 23 is displayed. After selecting the source parameters and pressing on **OK** the system directly continues with the optimization step of Figure 13. Analogue to the pre-planning step the deterministic optimization algorithm can be selected. The steps of generating multiple treatment solutions are then the same as with the pre-planning step.

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. Real time radiation treatment planning system for use in effecting radiation therapy of a pre-selected anatomical portion of an animal body, comprising:
 - A a stepper for automatically positioning imaging means for generating image data corresponding to the anatomical portion;
 - B means for inserting under the guidance of a template at least one hollow needle at a position into said anatomical portion;
 - C radiation delivery means for defining a plurality of positions having a spatial relationship within a volume of said anatomical portion and for inserting at least one energy emitting source through said at least one hollow needle at said plurality of positions into said anatomical portion;
 - D processing means for generating a radiation treatment plan for effecting said radiation therapy, said treatment plan including information concerning:
 - the number, position, direction and estimation of the best way of placement of one or more of said hollow needles within the anatomical shape and volume of said anatomical portion to be treated;
 - the amount of radiation dose to be emitted;**characterized in that**
 - said processing means are provided with a three-dimensional imaging algorithm and a three-dimensional image segmentation algorithm for at least the specific organs within said anatomical portion and the needles for converting the image data obtained with said imaging means into a three-dimensional image of the anatomical portion, whereby by using at least one single or multi-objective anatomy based genetic optimization algorithm for pre-planning or virtual simulation purposes said processing means are arranged to determine in real time the optimal number and position of at least one of said hollow needles, the position of said energy emitting source within each hollow needle as well as the dwell times of said energy emitting source

at each position; whereas

for post planning purposes said processing means are arranged to determine based on three-dimensional image information in real time the real needle positions and the dwell times of said energy emitting source for each position.

2. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 1, **characterized in that** for generating said treatment plan said anatomy based genetic optimization algorithm uses specific animal body related data and/or system related data and/or radiation related data.

3. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 2, **characterized in that** said animal body related data are data concerning the shape and localization of said anatomical portion and/or the shape and localization of specific organs near or within said anatomical portion.

4. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 2, **characterized in that** said system related data are data concerning the template and its position in relation to said anatomical portion of said animal body and/or the dimensions of the needles used and/or the minimum displacement distance of said energy emitting source through said radiation delivery means.

5. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 4, **characterized in that** the template has a grid configuration with needle holes at an intermediate distance of 3.5 mm seen in diagonal direction.

6. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 4, **characterized in that** the template has a grid configuration with needle holes at an intermediate distance of 2.5 mm seen in orthogonal direction.

7. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 4,

characterized in that the template is a motorized template without holes and the needles are guided with a guiding tube, whereas the guiding tube can be positioned in each position of the virtual template grid.

8. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 4, **characterized in that** said template is a detachable saddle shaped body surface fitting template detachable itself from the frame of the template.

9. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 2, **characterized in that** said radiation related data are data concerning the prescribed radiation dose to said anatomical portion of said animal body, the maximum radiation exposure dose to said specific organs near or within said anatomical portion.

10. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** for generating each treatment plan said processing means are arranged to generate a set of multiple sampling points using said three-dimensional imaging algorithm and said three-dimensional image segmentation algorithm and to calculate the optimal radiation dose distribution for each of said sampling points by using a gradient-based algorithm.

11. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 10, **characterized in that** the gradient-based algorithm for the radiation dose distribution calculation is based on the relations

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{\partial f_S}{\partial x_k} &= \frac{4x_k}{N_S m_S^3} \sum_{i=1}^{N_S} d_i^S (m_S \tilde{d}_{ik}^S - d_i^S \tilde{m}_k^S), \\ \frac{\partial f_V}{\partial x_k} &= \frac{4x_k}{N_V m_V^3} \sum_{i=1}^{N_V} d_i^V (m_V \tilde{d}_{ik}^V - d_i^V \tilde{m}_k^V), \\ \frac{\partial f_{OAR}}{\partial x_k} &= \frac{4x_k}{N_{OAR} (D_c^{OAR})^2 m_S^3} \sum_{i=1}^{N_{OAR}} \Theta(d_i^{OAR} - D_c^{OAR} m_S) (d_i^{OAR} - D_c^{OAR} m_S) (m_S \tilde{d}_{ik}^{OAR} - d_i^{OAR} \tilde{m}_k^S),\end{aligned}$$

$$d_i^s = \sum_{l=1}^{N_s} x_l^2 \tilde{d}_l^s, \quad m_s = \frac{1}{N_s} \sum_{l=1}^{N_s} d_l^s, \quad \bar{m}_k^s = \frac{1}{N_s} \sum_{l=1}^{N_s} \tilde{d}_l^s, \quad k = 1, \dots, N_d$$

$$d_i^v = \sum_{l=1}^{N_v} x_l^2 \tilde{d}_l^v, \quad m_v = \frac{1}{N_v} \sum_{l=1}^{N_v} d_l^v, \quad \bar{m}_k^v = \frac{1}{N_v} \sum_{l=1}^{N_v} \tilde{d}_l^v, \quad k = 1, \dots, N_d$$

$$d_i^{OAR} = \sum_{l=1}^{N_d} x_l^2 \tilde{d}_l^{OAR}$$

where m_s and m_v are the average dose values on the surface of the anatomical portion to be treated and within the anatomical portion respectively, where N_s , N_v are the corresponding numbers of sampling points, where N_{OAR} is the number of sampling points in the specific organ and D_c^{OAR} is the corresponding critical dose as a fraction of the prescription dose or reference dose, where d_i^s , d_i^v and d_i^{OAR} is the dose rate at the i^{th} sampling point on the surface of the anatomical portion, within the anatomical portion and within a specific organ respectively, wherein \tilde{d}_l^s , \tilde{d}_l^v , \tilde{d}_l^{OAR} are the dose kernel for the i^{th} sampling point and the l^{th} dwell position of the energy emitting source for the sampling points on the surface of the anatomical portion, within the anatomical portion and within a specific organ respectively, and where N_d is the number of dwell positions.

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12. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 11, characterized in that the processing means are arranged to minimize the dose variance f_s for each sampling point and the occurrence of high dose values within the anatomical portion according to the algorithms

$$f_s = \frac{1}{N_s} \sum_{i=1}^{N_s} \frac{(d_i^s - m_s)^2}{m_s^2} \quad \text{and} \quad f_v = \frac{1}{N_v} \sum_{i=1}^{N_v} \frac{(d_i^v - m_v)^2}{m_v^2},$$

wherein f_v is the dose distribution variance.

13. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 11 or 12, 25 characterized in that the processing means are arranged to minimize the dose variance f_{OAR} for each specific organ according to the algorithm

$$f_{OAR} = \frac{1}{N_{OAR}} \sum_{i=1}^{N_{OAR}} \frac{\Theta(d_i^{OAR} - D_c^{OAR} m_s) (d_i^{OAR} - D_c^{OAR} m_s)^2}{(D_c^{OAR} m_s)^2}$$

14. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the claims 10-13, **characterized in that** the number of operations for the calculation of the objective functions and their derivatives is independent on the number of sampling points.
15. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the claims 10-14, **characterized in that** said sampling points represent the boundary of said anatomical portion to be treated and/or the boundary of said specific organs and/or the position of one or more needles.
16. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the claims 10-15, **characterized in that** the sampling points which are located inside the hollow needles are excluded for the radiation dose distribution calculation.
17. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the claims 10-16, **characterized in that** the total calculated radiation dose for said sampling points equals the amount of radiation dose to be emitted.
18. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the claims 12-17, **characterized in that** the sampling points used for the evaluation of the radiation dose distribution and the calculation of the algorithms f_s , f_v and f_{OAR} are generated using a quasi-random number generator.
19. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** the position of each of the needles as virtually determined in said treatment plan is displayed in said three-dimensional image of the anatomical portion on a screen and is used to guidance the corresponding hollow needle at the actual position into said anatomical portion.
20. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 19, **characterized in that** the virtual needles are identified and their positions are

displayed as navigation indicators in the image of the anatomical portion obtained during the insertion of the real needles, which real needles replace one by one the virtual ones at the selected position.

21. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** after the execution of the three-dimensional image segmentation algorithm the genetic optimization algorithm is started automatically.

22. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** the definition of each pre-selected anatomic position is determined by a plurality of parallel, not necessarily adjacent contours of said segmented three-dimensional image, whereas additional intermediate contours are interpolated between them, if additional segments are present between the said adjacent contours.

23. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** the definition of a pre-selected anatomic region within the three-dimensional image of the anatomical portion is determined by a straight or curved path and by a closed curve perpendicular to this path, whereas the shape and the size of the closed curve may vary along the path by a plurality of methods.

24. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 23, **characterized in that** the closed curve is defined as a geometric curve of fixed size.

25. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 23, **characterized in that** a pre-selected anatomic region can be a specific organ within the anatomical portion, which specific organ is represented as a tube shaped organ and the closed curve as a circle or ellipsis.

26. Radiation treatment planning system according to claim 23, **characterized in that** a hollow needle is described with his real geometrical dimensions.
27. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** during the insertion of the needles their actual position in the animal body is visualized in real time by said imaging means.
28. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** during pre-planning each virtual needle is replaced step by step, after a scanning and three-dimensional reconstruction with the semi-automated segmented needles
29. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** after one or several virtual needles have been replaced by corresponding real needles in the anatomical portion a new treatment plan can be started using an initial needle configuration containing the positions of the real implanted and remaining virtual needles.
30. Radiation treatment planning system according to anyone of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** said processing means generate more than one treatment plan simultaneously and use at least one deterministic algorithm for offering a spectrum of best of all treatment solutions.
31. Method for generating a radiation treatment plan for use in effecting radiation therapy of a selected anatomical portion of an animal body of a patient, comprising the steps of:
 - imaging the anatomical portion to be treated;
 - generating a treatment plan for effecting said radiation therapy, said treatment plan including virtual information concerning:

- the number and position of one or more hollow needles within the anatomical shape and volume of said anatomical portion to be treated;
- the amount of radiation dose to be emitted;
- 5 inserting under the guidance of a template or guidance tool at least one hollow needle at a position into said anatomical portion; delivering at least one energy emitting sources through said at least one hollow needle into said anatomical portion using radiation delivery means; characterized in that
- 10 converting the image data obtained with said imaging means into a three-dimensional image of the anatomical portion using a three-dimensional imaging algorithm and a three-dimensional image segmentation algorithm for the specific organs within said anatomical portion, the needles and the energy emitting source, using at least one single or multi-objective anatomy based genetic optimization algorithm
- 15 for determining for pre-planning or virtual simulation purposes determine in real time the optimal number and position of at least one of said hollow needles, the position of said energy emitting source within each hollow needle as well as the dwell times of said energy emitting source at each position; and
- 20 for determining for post planning purposes based on three-dimensional image information in real time the real needle positions and the dwell times of said energy emitting source for each position.

32. A Real time radiation treatment planning system substantially as herein described in any one of the embodiments in the detailed description of the 25 invention with reference to the drawings.

33. A Method for generating a radiation treatment plan substantially as herein described in any one of the embodiments in the detailed description of the invention with reference to the drawings.

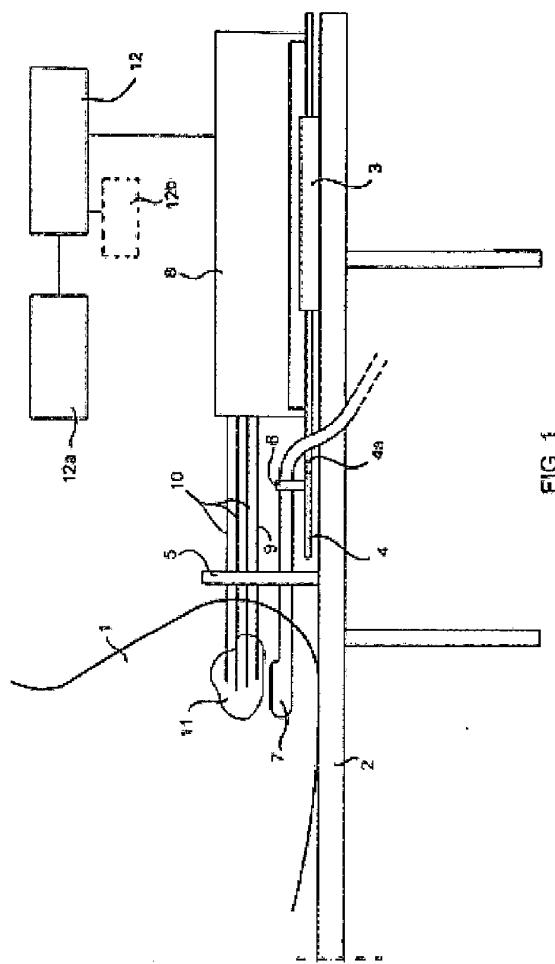


FIG. 1

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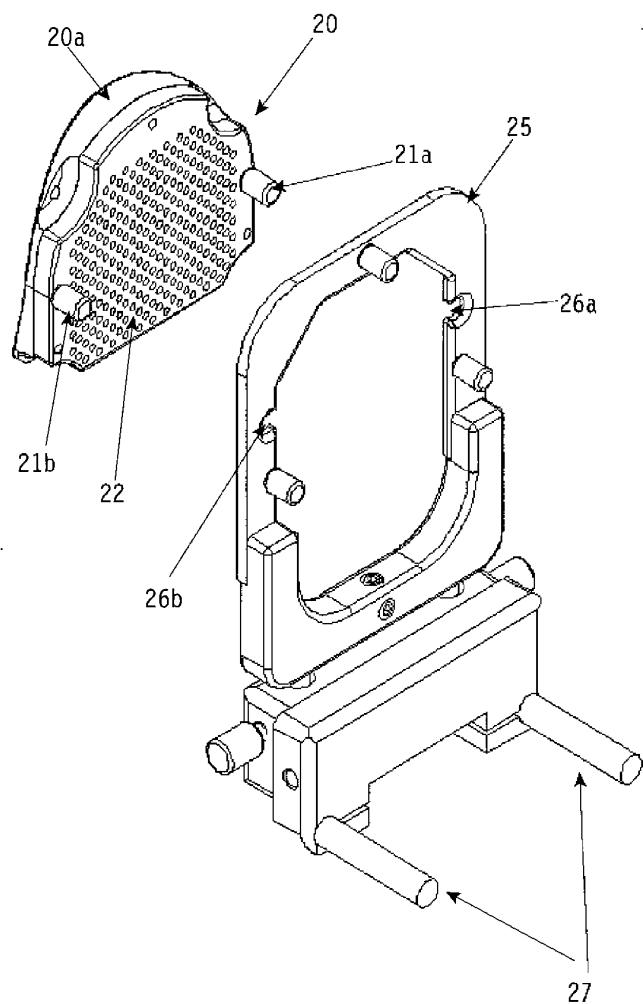


Fig. 2

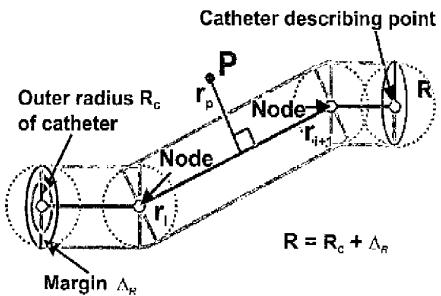


Fig. 3

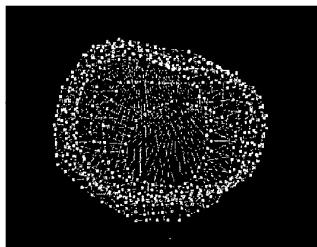


Fig. 4

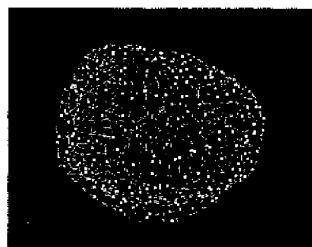


Fig. 5

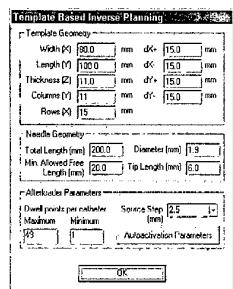


Fig. 6

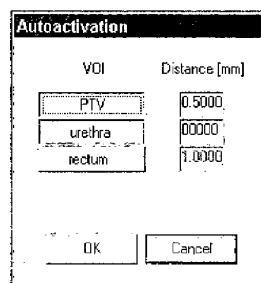


Fig. 7

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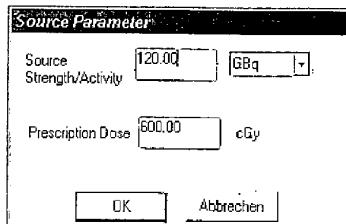


Fig. 8

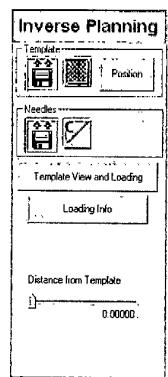


Fig. 9

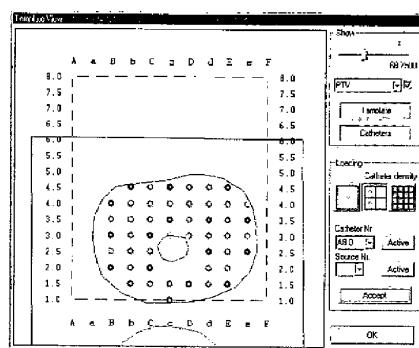


Fig. 10

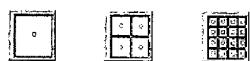


Fig. 11

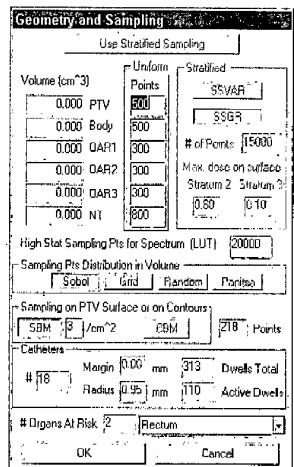


Fig. 12

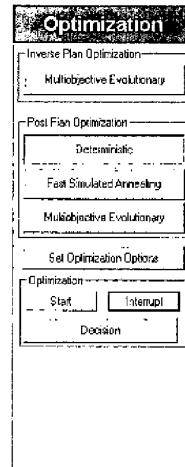


Fig. 13

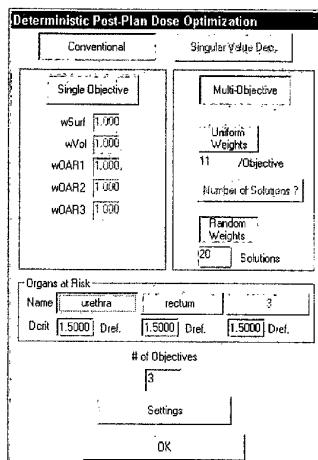


Fig. 14

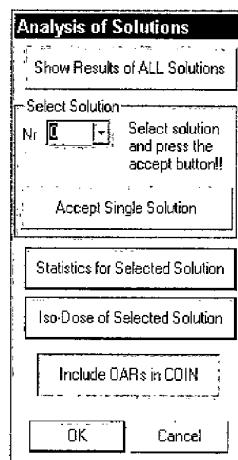


Fig. 15

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Solutions					
	Surface_Variation	Volume_Variation	(D-Dm)*2 for u...	CDIN(1.000)	DVH_PTV(1.000)
0	0.021244	0.056639	0.001704	0.765214	90.375000
1	0.034075	0.046559	0.000626	0.774938	87.925000
2	0.056342	0.040207	0.000039	0.749849	84.685000
3	0.000091	0.036742	0.000001	0.725735	81.345000
4	0.036524	0.044626	0.000277	0.775369	87.165000
5	0.022135	0.058047	0.000038	0.806195	90.295000
6	0.034554	0.046425	0.000219	0.779425	87.800000
7	0.016572	0.069532	0.000050	0.812913	91.655000
8	0.017482	0.064718	0.000279	0.797645	91.430000
9	0.030940	0.048891	0.000248	0.764953	88.590000
10	0.014670	0.070473	0.000347	0.750948	92.130000
11	0.029649	0.049192	0.000372	0.782527	90.630000
12	0.023934	0.059659	0.000904	0.785685	89.725000
13	0.023134	0.054812	0.000468	0.792220	99.895000
14	0.014140	0.075458	0.000356	0.730081	92.370000
15	0.046400	0.042208	0.000044	0.771115	86.115000
16	0.033680	0.047028	0.000114	0.785795	97.340000
17	0.028941	0.049576	0.000645	0.782323	86.795000
18	0.042137	0.043384	0.000757	0.771843	98.565000

Fig. 16

Solutions					
	D(Dm)*2 for u...	CDIN(1.000)	DVH_PTV(1.000)	DVH_PTV(1.500)	DVH(1.500) Rec...
001704	0.765214	50.375000	35.955000	0.000000	7.035000
000626	0.774938	67.925000	26.825000	0.000000	2.380000
000039	0.749849	64.685000	19.565000	0.000000	0.655000
000001	0.725735	61.345000	15.370000	0.000000	0.260000
000277	0.775369	67.165000	24.555000	0.000000	1.555000
000038	0.806195	90.295000	35.305000	0.000000	1.055000
000219	0.779425	87.800000	26.555000	0.000000	1.535000
000090	0.812913	91.655000	40.470000	0.000000	2.950000
000279	0.797645	91.430000	39.280000	0.000000	4.220000
000448	0.784953	88.580000	29.135000	0.000000	2.345000
000947	0.750548	92.130000	42.255000	0.000000	10.785000
000372	0.788257	88.680000	29.355000	0.000000	2.155000
000904	0.785556	89.765000	33.470000	0.000000	4.260000
000468	0.792020	69.895000	34.065000	0.000000	3.425000
000356	0.790081	92.370000	42.875000	0.000000	6.090000
000444	0.771116	96.115000	22.120000	0.000000	0.770000
000114	0.785795	87.540000	27.180000	0.000000	1.280000
000645	0.783725	98.795000	25.850000	0.000000	2.885000
000257	0.770032	96.565000	23.170000	0.000000	1.490000

Fig. 17

Solutions					
	Dose ² for u..	COIN(1,000)	DVH_PTV(1,000)	DVH_PTV(1,500)	DVH(1,500) Rec..
Save List	000947	0.750948	92.130000	42.255000	0.090300
Delete	001704	0.765214	90.375000	35.955700	0.090300
Constraints	000356	0.790081	92.370000	42.975000	0.090300
Histograms	000600	0.795193	90.755000	35.835000	0.090300
Pareto Set	000904	0.795656	90.765000	33.470000	0.090300
	000279	0.797645	91.430000	39.260000	0.090300
	000488	0.792020	93.895000	34.085000	0.090300
	000090	0.812913	91.635000	40.470000	0.090300
	000645	0.783725	88.795000	29.650000	0.090300
	000626	0.774938	87.525000	26.825000	0.090300
F.REPORT	000448	0.784953	98.580000	23.155000	0.090300
	000372	0.788257	86.680000	29.355000	0.090300
	000038	0.806195	91.295000	35.300000	0.090300
	000277	0.775368	87.165000	24.950000	0.090300
	000219	0.779425	87.600000	26.555000	0.090300
	000257	0.770832	85.565000	23.170000	0.090300
	000114	0.785755	87.940000	22.180000	0.090300
	000044	0.771116	85.115000	22.120000	0.090300
	000039	0.749944	94.555000	19.590000	0.090300
	41				

Fig. 18

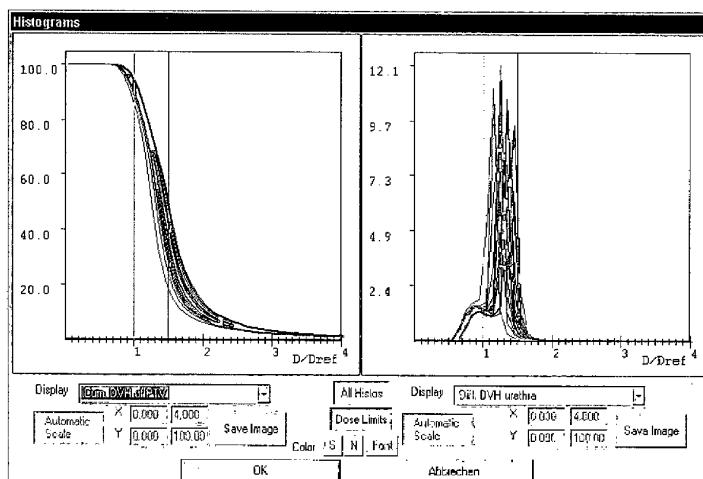


Fig. 19

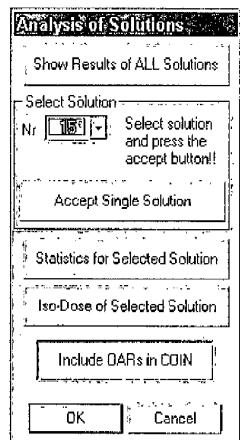


Fig. 20

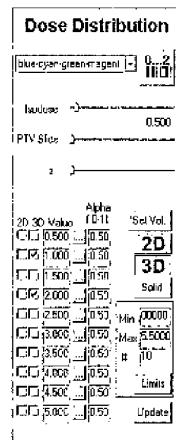


Fig. 21

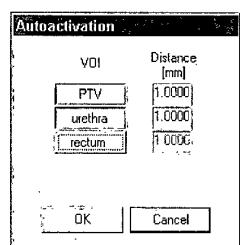


Fig. 22

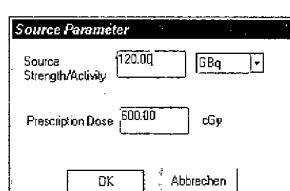


Fig. 23