



Technical Note

Ultra-fast, one-click radiotherapy treatment planning outside a treatment planning system

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ABSTRACT

We present an automated radiation oncology treatment planning pipeline that operates between segmentation and plan review, minimizing manual interaction and reliance on traditional planning systems. Two AI models work in sequence: the first generates a dose distribution, and the second creates a deliverable DICOM-RT plan. Trained and validated on 276 plans, and tested on 151 datasets, the system produced clinically deliverable plans—complete with all VMAT parameters—in about 38 s. These plans met target coverage and most organ-at-risk constraints. This proof-of-concept demonstrates the feasibility of generating high-quality, deliverable DICOM plans within seconds.

1. Introduction

Radiation oncology is essential in cancer treatment, with over half of patients receiving radiotherapy. Enhancing workflow efficiency is critical to meet the increasing demand, enabling clinical teams to treat more patients effectively while managing costs and resources [1]. Automation and artificial intelligence (AI) are promising strategies in adaptive settings to improve access and quality in radiotherapy, potentially increasing the return on investment [2–5].

The complexity of radiotherapy treatment planning (TP)—which depends heavily on the planner's skill, experience, and time investment—poses significant challenges amid rising demand. Inefficient workflows create bottlenecks that hinder the advancements of personalized radiotherapy, delaying the integration of online treatment adaptation [5].

Deep learning (DL) has the potential to revolutionize TP by significantly enhancing speed, accuracy, and consistency. Various models have been developed to predict the dose or fluence of Volumetric Modulated Arc Therapy (VMAT) plans [6–10]. However, these models often rely on traditional treatment planning systems (TPS) to finally convert predictions into executable DICOM RT plans for linear accelerators (LINACs), highlighting a gap in achieving a fully automated planning process outside commercial software.

We introduce a pipeline that combines a dose prediction model [10]

with another model that predicts machine parameters for VMAT plans [11]. This integration creates a novel fully automated pipeline capable of producing deliverable treatment plans without relying on a TPS in less than one minute in one click.

2. Materials and methods

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (1373/2023).

2.1. Autonomous treatment planning workflow

The pipeline integrated two DL models (Models A and B). It encompasses the TP workflow after segmentation and before plan review. This included preprocessing the input DICOM data (CT images and RT structures), transferring and upscaling the output from one model to the other, and ultimately generating machine parameters. These parameters were saved as a DICOM RT plan file, fully compatible with the original DICOM CT and structure datasets through matching unique identifiers (UID). The complete workflow is depicted in Fig. 1.

In Step 1 (Fig. 1), CT images were converted into a numerical array for the initial dose prediction (Model A) together with binary masks for the planning target volume (PTV) and organs-at-risk (OARs) obtained from the RT structure file, which was resampled to the same resolution

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($128 \times 128 \times 128$ voxels with a voxel size of 3.125 mm). For input of Model B, the CT and binary masks were resampled to $128 \times 128 \times 320$ voxels as Model B required a higher resolution in the cranio-caudal direction (resulting in voxels size of $3.125 \times 3.125 \times 1.25 \text{ m}^3$).

Step 2 represents **Model A**, the dose prediction model, that was based on a U-Net architecture [10]. Its output was a $128 \times 128 \times 128$ voxel-sized dose distribution.

In Step 3, this predicted dose distribution was up-sampled to $128 \times$

128×320 voxels, agreeing with the CT input for Model B. Additionally, the dose within the PTV was homogenized by adjusting each voxel's dose (D):

$$D_{new} = (1 - \alpha)D + \alpha \bar{D}_{PTV}$$

where \bar{D}_{PTV} is the mean dose within the PTV and α controls the weighting and was set to 0.5. This reduces variation and increases ho-

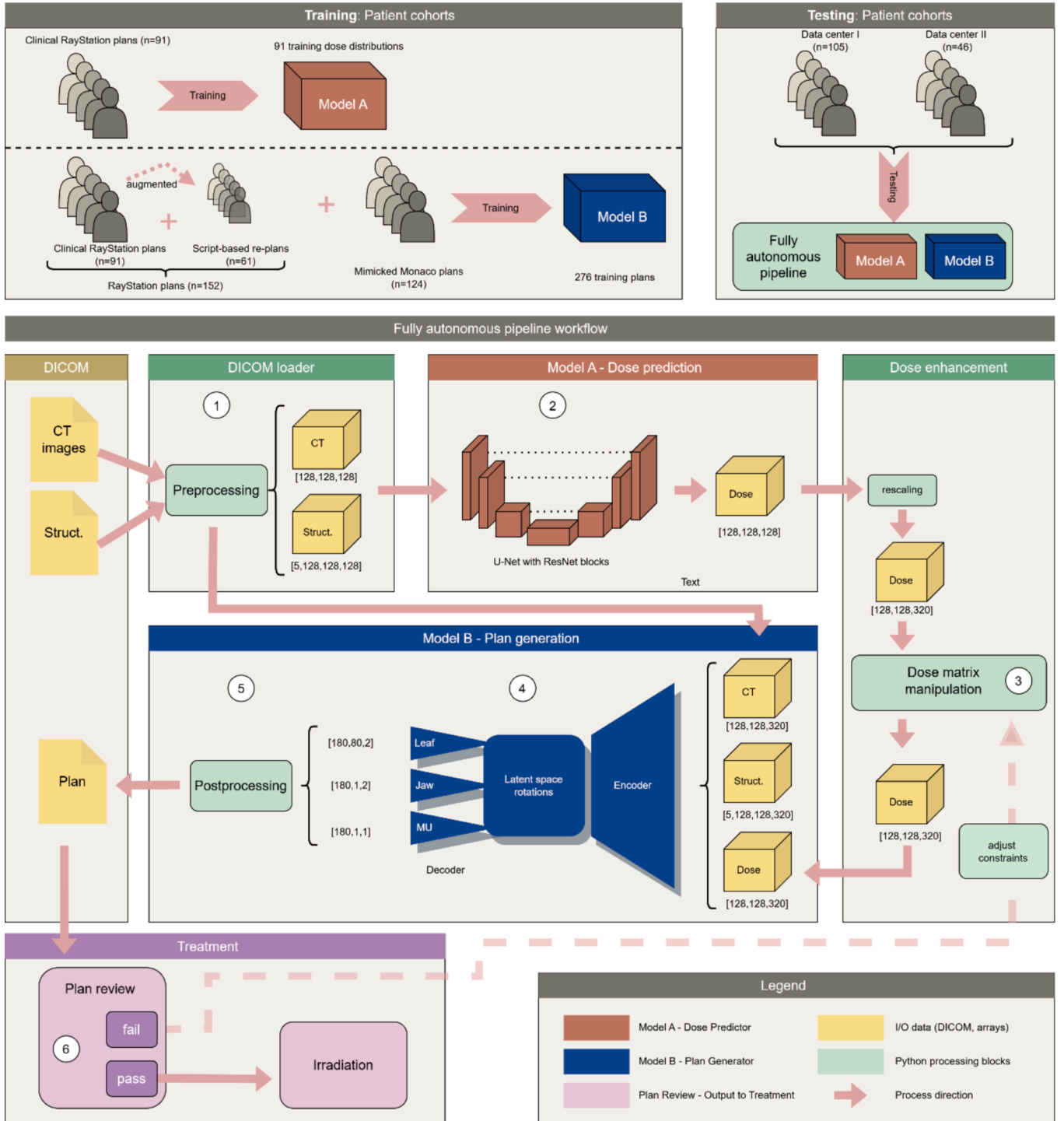


Fig. 1. Top: Patient cohorts used for training (left) and testing (right). Bottom: Fully autonomous pipeline workflow, starting with image and structure preprocessing in step 1 (steps symbolized as numbered white circles), followed by dose prediction in Model A (step 2). An adjustment of the dose is performed in step 3, before the dose acts as input for Model B, the plan generator, in step 4. In the postprocessing (step 5), potential machine violations are corrected to ensure the plan can be irradiated at the LINAC. Plan review (step 6) is the final external quality check.

mogeneity in the PTV.

In Step 4, this predicted dose distribution, together with the CT and structure masks, was used as input for **Model B**, generating machine parameters—leaf/jaw positions and monitor units (MU)—for all control points of a VMAT arc [11].

In Step 5, a vendor-specific post-processing step was implemented to ensure no predicted machine parameters violated specific constraints, securing conformity within the machine’s capabilities (e.g., minimum leaf gaps and travel speeds). The final parameters were then compiled into a DICOM plan, including patient metadata, achieving compatibility with the CT and structure set.

2.2. Data and model training

Models A and B were trained separately and specifically for this study with datasets not used in previous publications. The clinical TP protocol is described in the [supplementary materials](#).

Model A was a U-Net with additional ResNet blocks interspersed between the up- and down-sampling convolutions. The training was done with an AdamW optimizer coupled with the One Cycle scheduler and an initial learning rate of 0.001. We combined L1 loss with a feature loss [12], which extracts higher-order information using a pre-trained model [13]. Specifically, this study introduced an additional gradient loss function, designed to compute the dose gradient across the dose distribution. This loss function was incorporated to improve the model’s ability to predict accurate dose distributions. The batch size was 2 for 40 k iterations.

For training (see Fig. 1 top left) the dose prediction model (**Model A**), 91 clinically approved datasets (CT, structures, dose) from patients treated for localized prostate cancer at the Department of Radiation Oncology at the Medical University of Vienna (MUW) between 01/2021 and 12/2023 were used.

Model B employed an encoder with three decoders to accurately predict the necessary parameters for creating a compliant DICOM RT plan [11]. The encoder employed a ResNet-18 with 3D convolutions as its backbone, using pre-trained MedicalNet weights [14] and processed the original plan dose. The latent space output was manipulated by rotating it along the patient’s longitudinal axis, creating beams-eye-views for each control point by resampling the data at the beam’s isocenter. Three separate decoders for the leaf and jaw positions and the monitor units predict all machine parameters for a DICOM RT plan. Training was done with the Lion optimizer [15] for 40 k iterations and a batch size of 5. Separate L1 losses were computed for leaf position, jaw positions, and MUs.

For training **Model B** (plan generation), the same 91 clinically approved prostate plans as for **Model A** were used (CT, structures, dose, and plan). Additionally, the training data was augmented through a semi-automated TP workflow. This workflow utilized a knowledge-based scripting approach, developed in-house (unpublished) and implemented via the Python scripting interface in RayStation (RaySearch Laboratories, Sweden). The database stored a range of anatomical features, including OAR and target volumes, and proximity measures (e.g., surface-to-surface and center-of-mass distances). Anatomically similar patients were identified by comparing segmented CT data with stored anatomical profiles. Their corresponding optimization parameters were then applied to initiate the initial optimization in the TPS. In addition, mean dose-volume histograms (DVHs) from these similar patients were calculated and used to inform a projected target DVH. This added 61 datasets.

To further expand the training data, the dose-mimicking module in RayStation was employed. This approach utilized prostate treatment plans previously generated in the TPS Monaco (Elekta, Sweden) which were incompatible with RayStation plans, thereby contributing 124 additional datasets to the training pool, leading to a final training dataset size of 276.

2.3. Evaluation of the generated plans

A total of 151 independent patients (see Fig. 1 top right), not part of the training, were used for testing (see Fig. 1). The DICOM CT images and RT structure files were used as input. Of these, 105 patients were prostate patients from MUW treated between 2021 and 2024 and 46 from Umeå University (Department of Diagnostics and Intervention) from 2022 to 2023. Different TPSs were used in both centers, as well as treatment machines and prescription levels (e.g., ultra-hypofractionated). Although most original clinical plans could not be directly compared with those generated in this study, a direct comparison for two plans with compatible prescription levels is included in the [supplementary data](#).

International OAR guidelines, with bladder and rectum dose constraints based on CHHiP [16] recommendations were used to quantify plan quality. In addition, constraints developed from local clinical experience at MUW were applied (Table 1). Target evaluation included PTV coverage, reporting $D_{95\%}$, $D_{1\%}$ consistent with established standards [17,18]. For plan review (Fig. 1, step 6) the generated plans were recalculated with a commercial dose engine, i.e., collapsed-cone in RayStation or Monte Carlo in SciMoCa (ScientificRT GmbH, Germany) [19]. The MUs were then normalized to match the minimum requirements for tumor coverage.

Lastly, a patient-specific quality assurance (PSQA) process was employed to confirm the clinical viability of our generated plans. A random set of 15 plans was tested on a PSQA phantom (Delta4 Scandidos, Sweden), with acceptance criteria aligned with those applied to clinical plans, namely a gamma-index threshold (>90 %). This allows verification of the automatically generated plans to ensure they meet delivery and safety standards.

3. Results

In total 151 prostate treatment plans were generated with the pipeline. The average time required to produce a treatment plan from a segmented CT without any user interaction was 38 ± 6 s, while about half of that time was spent on pre- and post-processing. The inference was done on a workstation (AMD Ryzen 7 3700-X 8 Core 3.6 GHz, RTX 2080Ti).

The results of these 151 predicted plans concerning the clinical goals are presented in Table 1 and in the [supplementary materials](#). The rectum

Table 1

Results of the clinical goal evaluation based on CHHiP [16] and the Medical University of Vienna (MUW) internal clinical goals for 151 generated plans.

ROI	Source	Criteria	Goal	Plans that achieved the goal		
Bladder	CHHiP	V40.8 Gy	50 %	100 %		
		V48.6 Gy	25 %	97 %		
		V60Gy	5 %	76 %		
	MUW	V54Gy	20 %	100 %		
		V48Gy	40 %	100 %		
		V44Gy	50 %	100 %		
		V30Gy	80 %	100 %		
		D1%	66 Gy	92 %		
		Rectum	CHHiP	V60Gy	3 %	58 %
				V57Gy	15 %	100 %
V52.8 Gy	30 %			100 %		
V48.6 Gy	50 %			100 %		
V40.8 Gy	60 %			100 %		
MUW	V54Gy		20 %	93 %		
	V48Gy		40 %	100 %		
	V40Gy		45 %	100 %		
	V30Gy		60 %	100 %		
	V20Gy		54 %	100 %		
FemoralHead	MUW	D1%	66 Gy	99 %		
		V46Gy	5 %	100 %		
PTV Prostate	MUW	D95%	57 Gy	100 %		
		D1%	66 Gy	51 %		

criteria were fulfilled in nearly all 151 cases, except $V_{60\text{Gy}}$ (CHHiP), which was exceeded in 42 % of the evaluated plans. $V_{60\text{Gy}}$ was also the most challenging criterion for the bladder and was not fulfilled in 24 %. The MUW criteria focused on the maximum dose substitute ($D_{1\%}$), which was exceeded in 7 % of the plans. While target coverage ($D_{95\%}$) was achieved in all generated plans, dose heterogeneity ($D_{1\%}$) was more challenging, with success in only 51 %.

The PSQA measurements of the randomly selected 15 treatment plans demonstrated that the plans could be delivered at a clinical LINAC. All 15 plans met the clinical criteria (2 %/2mm, >90 % gamma pass rates) for acceptance with pass rates of 95.4 ± 0.7 %.

4. Discussion

The pipeline efficiently generated VMAT treatment plans directly from segmented CT images, autonomously producing DICOM RT plan files ready for treatment without the need for a traditional TPS in 38 ± 6 s.

A recent ESTRO challenge explored the extent of automation possible in radiotherapy planning [8]. Our study addressed the process from segmented CT images to plan review and differed from previous studies in several aspects; other approaches included script-based solutions within a TPS [9,20,21] or dose prediction models [10,22–24], which rely on TPS to generate plan files. Fluence prediction [25,26], eliminates the need for mathematical optimization to convert dose distributions into fluence maps but TPS sequencing is required to produce the plan file. Recently, reinforcement learning (RL) agents were explored for automatic plan optimization [27,28]. RL shows potential, however, further studies are required to describe the limitations and challenges of this technique in the context of radiation oncology [5,29].

Some studies presented plan generation outside a commercial TPS – such as interfacing with matRAD [8] or Hyperion [30]. However, these studies use conventional plan optimization or sequencing within a TPS, a shortcoming surpassed by our approach by combining two AI models in sequence to directly predict machine parameters.

There still are several limitations in our proof of concept. The model does not generalize well outside the training dataset, which means localized prostate cancer patients, moderately hypofractionated (20×3 Gy). All patients were treated with a rectal balloon and no spacer. Most datasets were from low-risk patients, with only few including extensive seminal vesicles. Thus, handling more complex target-normal tissue configurations will require larger training datasets. Additionally, the pipeline currently produces files for one specific LINAC vendor, necessitating future generalization. For several cases, the plan quality did not meet clinical expectations, highlighting the need for more refined model architectures. Potential improvements include dividing the problem into 2D projections to reduce model size and increase batch size, or leveraging transformer networks to better capture the sequential nature of the MLC sequence [31]. Note that the pipeline starts after the segmentation process, thus tasks such as inserting a couch model were not addressed in this study. Moreover, the typical iterative replanning process familiar to conventional TPS users remains underdeveloped in our pipeline. Although we suggest a possible approach—indicated by the dashed line in Fig. 1 linking step 6 back to step 3—this remains a conceptual solution, and additional research is needed to fully implement and validate a robust replanning mechanism.

Finally, our pipeline does not inherently provide dose calculations using a commercial dose engine. However, this can be advantageous: since our pipeline rapidly produces deliverable plan files, these can be reviewed using more lightweight, web-based secondary plan review platforms—such as SciMoCa (ScientificRT GmbH, Germany), DOSIsoft (DOSIsoft, France), VERIQA RT MonteCarlo (PTW, Germany), DoseCHECK (Sun Nuclear, USA), or RadCalc (LAP GmbH Laser Applications, Germany)—without the overhead of an expensive commercial TPS. A future with rapid AI-based replanning presents significant challenges for quality assurance. Given the strict regulations in some

countries, a fundamental re-evaluation of QA requirements may be necessary, as we see with dedicated adaptive radiotherapy machines today [32,33].

5. Declaration on Generative AI

Generative AI (OpenAI ChatGPT v-o1) was utilized for proofreading this manuscript. All AI-generated suggestions were carefully reviewed and edited by the authors to ensure accuracy and clarity.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: The Department of Radiation Oncology at the Medical University of Vienna has institutional research contracts with RaySearch Laboratories (Sweden), ELEKTA (Sweden), and Brainlab (Germany).

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.phro.2025.100724>.

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