

Virve Sarja - Head of EMEA & Executive Vice President, Varian



We are not just imagining a world without the fear of cancer; we are actively building it.

02.09.2025

Tags: [Switzerland](#), [Varian](#), [Oncology](#), [Medtech](#)

From her beginnings as an operating room nurse to her current role as Head of Varian EMEA, Virve Sarja has shaped a career grounded in purpose and driven by innovation. Today, she reflects on how Varian, as part of Siemens Healthineers, is redefining the future of oncology, bringing together advanced imaging, theranostics, adaptive radiotherapy, and AI-powered software to expand access and transform cancer care across more than 130 countries

What has been your career journey, and what responsibilities do you hold today at Varian and Siemens Healthineers?

Since January 2025, I have been serving as Head of Varian for Europe, the Middle East and Africa, having previously led one of our largest zones as Zone Head for Central Western Europe from September 2022. My professional journey in healthcare spans more than three decades, beginning as an operating room nurse before I decided to pursue a business career. For nearly 25 years, I have worked in MedTech, a sector that has always been close to my heart. This blend of clinical roots and business leadership has shaped my perspective and continues to drive me in making a meaningful contribution to patients, communities, and healthcare systems.

How would you describe Varian's identity within Siemens Healthineers today, and what role does it play in shaping the global fight against cancer?

Varian is now fully integrated within Siemens Healthineers, but rather than losing our identity, we have expanded it. Our long-standing focus has been to lead, innovate, and pioneer in cancer care, and that remains at the core of who we are. What has changed is that we now work across the entire continuum of care, strengthened by Siemens Healthineers' broader capabilities.

In the past, Varian concentrated primarily on radiotherapy, but today our scope begins with diagnostics – ideally early diagnostics – moving through imaging, which shapes treatment decisions, into interventional solutions, and extends through radiotherapy patient monitoring, follow-up and survivorship. This end-to-end approach reflects our commitment to supporting the entire cancer care journey. This comprehensive view is essential given the challenges ahead: by 2040, the world is expected to see nearly nine million more cancer patients and around five million additional cancer-related deaths each year compared with today. Responding to that reality requires an integrated approach that connects all stages of care rather than treating them in isolation.

As one of Siemens Healthineers' key business lines, Varian is well-positioned to help build that continuum. Integration allows us to accelerate innovation, refine our processes, and reimagine how we collaborate with healthcare providers. Ultimately, it enables us to deliver greater value to our customers and, most importantly, better outcomes for patients.

How significant is the EMEA region for Varian within Siemens Healthineers, and what makes it distinctive?

The EMEA region represents a substantial part of our overall business and has been an important contributor to recent growth. It is also one of the most diverse regions we operate in, covering more than 130 countries with widely differing healthcare systems, infrastructures, and levels of economic maturity. Managing this complexity requires flexibility and highly localised approaches that reflect the realities on the ground.

Despite this diversity, what binds our work together is a shared mission: to create a world without the fear of cancer. This is a powerful commitment and one that shapes how we innovate and how we serve our communities. Just as diabetes was once a fatal disease but is now largely manageable, our ambition is to help transform cancer into a chronic condition that patients can live

with. Having the full support and resources of Siemens Healthineers makes this ambition more achievable, enabling us to connect innovation, expertise, and delivery in ways that can have a real impact across such a vast and varied region.

What are the key pillars of Varian's cancer care portfolio, and which solutions are you most excited about today?

Our portfolio is broad and continues to evolve, beginning with the advanced imaging and diagnostic capabilities of Siemens Healthineers. Early detection is often decisive in determining both the likelihood of recovery and the effectiveness of treatment planning, and the integration has significantly strengthened our ability to support clinicians in this critical phase of the patient journey.

Theranostics is an area set to shape the future of oncology by combining diagnostics and therapy through molecular imaging and radiopharmaceuticals, enabling more personalised and targeted care. At the same time, Varian's long-standing expertise in radiotherapy and radiosurgery continues to advance. Technologies such as high-precision radiotherapy, image guidance, and adaptive planning are making treatments increasingly accurate and efficient. In practice, this means that prostate cancer patients who once required 25 or 30 hospital visits can now, in some cases, complete therapy in just five sessions. Similarly, stereotactic radiosurgery is being used more widely for brain metastases, while daily adaptive planning allows clinicians to adjust treatments in near real time when tumours shift or patient anatomy changes, enhancing both safety and outcomes.

Just as essential is the digital foundation that ties everything together. Software, artificial intelligence, and workflow solutions connect people, data, and systems, supporting faster and more informed decisions while personalising the entire treatment pathway. This digital layer ensures that innovation is not only about technology but also about practicality, helping care to become more efficient, more precise, and ultimately more centred around the needs of patients.

What does it mean in practice to deliver the full cancer care continuum across such a diverse EMEA region, spanning more than 130 countries?

Operating across such a vast and varied region requires a highly localised approach. Healthcare systems differ dramatically; some countries have well-established reimbursement structures for

innovation, while in others, no reimbursement system exists at all. In parts of Africa, for instance, there may not even be a single linear accelerator, which demands a very different strategy than in Switzerland, where access to care is straightforward. My priority is to expand access so that our innovations can benefit patients everywhere, irrespective of geography or economic maturity. To achieve this, we adapt our presence to the realities of each market: in some countries, we have a direct organisation, and in some cases, we work through trusted business partners. This flexibility allows us to combine broad reach with locally relevant solutions. Just as importantly, we work closely with government and healthcare institutions to support the training of radiotherapy professionals, ensuring that access to technology is matched by the capacity to use it effectively. In this way, the continuum of care we strive to deliver is meaningful and accessible across the region.

How do you approach market access across EMEA, and to what extent are tenders part of your strategy?

Tenders are a fundamental part of our operations, whether under the regulations of the European Union or through local frameworks, and we are engaged in them continuously across the region. But for us, market access is never just about participating in a procurement process; it is about working hand in hand with governments and healthcare providers to modernise cancer care infrastructure. That means going beyond the delivery of equipment to include sharing expertise, providing training, and ensuring that new technologies can be effectively integrated into daily practice.

In many markets, obstacles arise due to the absence of reimbursement mechanisms or because specific regulatory requirements create delays in bringing innovations to patients. To address these challenges, we place strong emphasis on generating both clinical and economic evidence, whether through Varian-sponsored clinical trials or investigator-initiated studies with our partners. This evidence is essential in building the foundation for adoption and reimbursement. Ultimately, our approach is rooted in dialogue and collaboration: rather than presenting technology as a stand-alone product, we focus on ensuring that innovations are understood, supported, and embedded in healthcare systems in a way that delivers tangible value for patients and providers alike.

How are procurement bodies evolving in their approach to innovation, and what common threads do you observe across such a diverse region?

I do see a shift taking place. One of my strategic priorities has been to move beyond the role of technology supplier and instead act as a genuine partner to our customers, co-creating cancer care pathways that enhance outcomes. Increasingly, procurement bodies are showing interest in this value-based approach, though the pace of adoption varies widely across countries. The diversity of EMEA gives us the chance to leverage benchmarking: when we achieve success in one market – for instance, introducing hyper-fractionated radiotherapy supported by reimbursement – that outcome can serve as a reference point for other systems considering similar innovations.

Despite the variety of healthcare structures across the region, there are common challenges that unite them. Chief among these is the shortage of qualified personnel, which is becoming more acute as cancer incidence continues to rise while the number of trained professionals fails to keep pace. This is where innovation in software, artificial intelligence, and digital tools becomes essential. These solutions not only improve efficiency but also help providers manage growing demand with limited human resources, while safeguarding the quality and timeliness of patient care. For me, the responsibility is clear: we must deliver technologies that directly address these pain points and partner not only with hospitals but also with governments and regulators to ensure that healthcare systems are equipped not just for today's needs, but for the years ahead.

How do you ensure continuous training for medical professionals using your technologies, and where do you see the next opportunities in AI and digital innovation?

Training is a cornerstone of what we do, because even the most advanced technology only makes a difference when clinicians are fully confident in using it. Globally, we have hundreds of colleagues dedicated to professional education, delivering structured training courses as well as on-site support. Our application specialists work directly alongside clinicians, sitting with them as they implement new technologies. We also provide a help desk available throughout the treatment week to respond quickly to questions. Beyond that, our Advanced Oncology Services support hospitals in integrating innovations, from implementation and workflow optimisation to change management, ensuring that new solutions become part of everyday practice in a meaningful way.

Looking ahead, much of our innovation is already powered by artificial intelligence, and this will only deepen. AI is helping us accelerate time-intensive steps such as imaging, contouring, and treatment planning, reducing delays between diagnosis, therapy, and recovery by automating repetitive tasks. Another example is Noona, our digital platform for patient-reported outcomes, which allows patients to log symptoms, access educational content, manage appointments, and

remain in continuous contact with their care teams. For clinicians, it provides real-time insights into the patient's condition and supports more personalised, responsive care. To me, this is particularly meaningful because it ensures that patients are not passive participants but active voices throughout their treatment journey.

Why was Switzerland chosen as the base for Varian's EMEA operations, and what qualities do you emphasise in building your team here?

Although Siemens Healthineers is headquartered in Germany, Varian's EMEA operations are based in Switzerland, which offers significant advantages for a company like ours. The country is an established hub for both pharma and medtech, with a strong ecosystem of life sciences companies and institutions clustered in proximity. This creates opportunities for collaboration and access to expertise, while Switzerland's central location makes it an ideal base for coordinating activities across such a large and diverse region. There is also a genuine curiosity and openness to healthcare innovation here, which contributes to an environment that feels supportive and well-connected.

From a leadership perspective, everything begins with purpose. Our mission, to work toward a world without the fear of cancer, is not only our guiding principle but also what drives our people every day. It is something you will hear echoed across the organisation because it is deeply internalised, especially when colleagues encounter patients directly in hospitals and see firsthand the difference their work can make.

To deliver on this mission, we rely on a broad set of competencies: clinical expertise for training and education, technical skills to support and maintain our technologies, commercial capabilities to build partnerships, and strong local knowledge to navigate complex healthcare systems. Because our people operate in challenging environments, qualities such as resilience, trust, and open communication are essential. We also place a high value on diversity, both in terms of backgrounds and nationalities, as it brings fresh perspectives and strengthens our adaptability. Switzerland, in this respect, provides access to exceptional talent, which makes it a particularly strong foundation for our regional operations.

How do you want Varian to be recognised within Siemens Healthineers, and what final message would you share with our international audience?

Varian now operates as a business line within Siemens Healthineers, yet our identity remains clear. We want to be recognised for what we represent: the full continuum of cancer care. Whether people refer to Varian or Siemens Healthineers, the essential message is the same: that we are committed to advancing oncology across the entire patient journey, from early detection and diagnosis through treatment, follow-up, and survivorship. As part of Siemens Healthineer, Varian is guided by a shared purpose that extends beyond technology: We pioneer breakthroughs in healthcare. For everyone. Everywhere. Sustainably.

Equally important is the scale of our impact. Today, our technologies are involved in around 22 million patient touchpoints every year. This number is not simply about reach; it reflects a responsibility. We are not only scaling our solutions, but also scaling equity, outcomes, and hope. Staying true to our purpose and values is vital, and we strive to inspire the healthcare communities we serve by working as partners rather than simply technology providers. Ultimately, we are not just imagining a world without the fear of cancer; we are actively building it together with our customers, teams, and broader healthcare networks.

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