
ECR 2024 Day 3: Prioritising Radiographers' Mental Health & Wellness - Nurturing Caregivers



In the demanding landscape of healthcare, radiographers serve as the cornerstone of diagnostic and radiotherapy services, playing a pivotal role in patient care. There is a need to collectively address the critical issue of sustaining and supporting those who dedicate their careers to caring for others. Compassionate leadership and resilience-building are one of the strategies radiographers can leverage to prioritise their mental health and wellness while continuing to provide exceptional care.

Staff Burnout in the Radiology Department

Dávid Sipos (Hungary) started the session by going over a few elements of burnout and staff shortage. Burnout is a state of complete mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion characterised by constant fatigue, apathy, unexplained physical symptoms, changes to normal patterns and emotional outbursts.

Work-related mental harm is defined as the state of chronic emotional strain, physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from prolonged stress. Its effects can be emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and decreased performance.

Targeted protective interventions can be implemented for this group of affiliated health professionals in order to minimize the chronic effects of occupational stress and burnout. Mental state of radiographers should be monitored and their needs assessed. Burnout risks can be reduced if radiology departments collectively accept innovation, acknowledge their limitations and put in place the appropriate coping mechanisms.

From empathy to action: compassionate leadership in combating workplace harassment

Amy Hancock (UK) set out in the second lecture to offer a definition of harassment in the healthcare workplace, an overview of the challenges faced when addressing workplace harassment, and how compassionate leadership can overcome these barriers. Harassment is defined as a behaviour that makes someone feel intimidated or offended. Examples can include spreading malicious rumours, unfair treatment, picking on or regularly undermining someone, denying someone's training or promotion opportunities.

Direct impact on the victim are quick to set in, and can have vast consequences for the department. For the individual, disengagement translates in loss of drive personal and professional ambition. For the workplace, harassment can lead to decreased opportunity for service improvement and development through periods of sickness and absence, resignations or even leaving the profession.

Challenges exist when addressing workplace harassment:

- Lack of reporting mechanisms, support or assistance
- Organisational culture that tolerates or ignores harassment
- Fear of repercussions
- Feeling defeated

Such challenges are prevented by strategies that focus proactively on ensuring worker wellbeing and fostering good relations, giving employees and managers the confidence to engage in early and informal resolution.

Compassionate leadership is defined as the intention to help, by identifying and understanding the individual with the aim of meeting their needs. It is characterised by unique interaction that promotes connection between individuals and is reflective of a genuine desire to help. Compassionate leaders will enable those they lead to feel valued, respected and cared for, so they can reach their potential and do their best work. Four behaviours are to be fostered by compassionate leaders to focus on professional relationships: Attending, Understanding, Empathising, Helping.

Strategies can be implemented to cultivate compassionate leadership. Leaders can indeed focus on creating safe spaces, actively listening and validating employees' experiences, encouraging open dialogue and providing time as well as promoting open door practices. Access to training and development programs for leaders on empathy and compassion also play a pivotal role.

A compassionate workplace is recognisable by the implementation of simple yet crucial policies:

- Established communication channels for reporting harassment
- Clear policies & procedures for addressing harassment (which are enforced)
- Bystander intervention and allyship is encouraged
- Culture of accountability and zero tolerance for harassment
- Organisational culture is regularly assessed & monitored
- Support and resources are available to victims of harassment

Building resilience: enhancing radiographers' mental health in high-stress environments

Barry Hallinan's (Ireland) lecture was dedicated to resilience for radiographers and how to deal with high-stress environments. Resilience can be defined by dealing with the past, coping with the present, and looking forward to the future. Resilience is both the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. A number of factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities, including the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world, the availability and quality of social resources and specific coping strategies. Psychological research demonstrates that the resources and skills associated with resilience can be cultivated and practiced.

Resilience doesn't mean not experiencing pain and suffering, but to be able to withstand adversity and function through it. Resilient people tap into their strengths and support systems to overcome challenges and work through problems.

The 7C model gives an indication on how to build resilience through these skills and factors: competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping and control. Barriers on the way towards resilience are unfortunately multiple. Imbalance between work and personal life and overexposure to stressful events are obstacles, as well as having insufficient space/time to process negative feelings, humiliating experiences and social isolation.

Mitigation of these circumstances forms the basis for both individual (personal) and structural (organisational) interventions to increase resilience. A resilient mindset can be forged by self-belief and positivity, in order to challenge negative thoughts and look at issues in a different light. Feeling appreciated at work has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety and fatigue in healthcare professionals. Articulated workplace policies related to mental health need to be prioritised to prevent staff attrition. Training related to self-compassion should be promoted in medical imaging departments.

Pr Hallinan offered 8 recommended actions to implement to help radiology staff build resilience:

1. A stepped care staff support pathway
2. Good and updated Communication
3. Ensure staff are rested with breaks and access to respite areas
4. Reduce Mental Health
5. Remove barriers to support
6. Use sustainable technologies to mitigate risk
7. Involve staff in planning
8. Ensure adequate training, supervision and maintain research opportunities

Image Source: [ResearchGate](#)

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