
ECR 2024 Day 4: Advancing Radiology in Times of Dwindling Resources and Increasing Demands



In the last plenary session of ECR 2024, Pr Annemiek Snoeckx (Belgium) started by addressing the profound transformation radiology has undergone over the past two decades, powered by rapid technological advancements. From the days of light boxes and printed images to the era of sophisticated workstations and volumetric data sets, radiologists have witnessed a remarkable evolution in the way they practice. However, along with these advancements comes a myriad of challenges that necessitate a delicate balance between embracing technology and preserving the human aspect of patient care.

Technical advances are a double-edged sword: more images, more workload

The advent of advanced imaging technology has undoubtedly increased efficiency, diagnostic confidence, and precision. Radiologists now have access to an array of tools and techniques, including functional and molecular imaging modalities, enabling them to provide more comprehensive assessments of patient conditions than ever before. Yet, as the capabilities of technology expand, so too does the volume of imaging studies and the complexity of interpretation.

With the exponential growth in images per study, radiologists find themselves facing an overwhelming workload, compounded by the rising demands of an aging population and advancements in medical treatments. The rise of chronic diseases has created a category of returning patients who are mobilising vast healthcare resources. The healthcare workforce itself is aging.

The traditional role of radiologists as mere image interpreters has evolved into that of integral members of multidisciplinary care teams, collaborating closely with clinicians across various specialties. However, this expanded role brings with it increased pressure to deliver timely and accurate diagnoses, often within narrow timeframes.

To address these challenges, many have turned to artificial intelligence (AI) as a potential solution. AI offers many promises, and while it holds great potential, it is not without its limitations. AI is able to support radiologists with improved diagnostic accuracy, but this increased data impacts radiologists' workloads and further reduces their available time. Integration of AI in routine tasks and reporting can alleviate these challenges, and free up some time for radiologists to focus on other innovations, mainly in the field of personalised medicine.

Radiologists' well-being is the key to patient-centred care

In addition to technological advancements, attention must also be paid to the well-being of radiologists themselves. The increasing demands of the profession, coupled with the pressures of meeting tight deadlines and maintaining diagnostic accuracy, have led to a rise in burnout among radiologists. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that prioritises work-life balance, resilience, and mental health support. Well-being in the radiology department improves retention, reduces the risk of burnout-induced error, and is generally bringing back a net gain to health organisations and leadership teams, both in economic aspects and in quality of care.

Pr Snoeckx offered six pillars to build radiologists' well-being on.

1. Culture and Values of the organization should be aligned with these of team members and should foster the pursuit of meaning, prioritizing the role identity over simple tasks description.
2. Autonomy, Belonging and Competence is the ABC of work happiness. Radiologists should feel in control of their role, be part of a family sharing the same goals and possess the best skills and tools to realise their mission.
3. Growth opportunities should exist and empower radiologists to activate lifelong learning strategies to tackle the challenges of tomorrow.
4. Workplace environment should acknowledge burnout and offer remedies by respecting workstyle preferences, limiting multitasking and

allowing brain rest moments.

5. Healthy lifestyle is not only an individual choice, the work environment has a crucial influence and should actively motivate people's healthy choices.
6. Social contact is the foundation for efficient collaboration, innovation and building resilience.
7. Right leaders should value EQ over IQ, and learn to recognize signs of distress to lift up and inspire team leaders.

Developing a growth mindset should be the key objective to empower radiology practitioners to:

- Embrace challenges instead of avoiding them
- Persist in the face of setbacks instead of giving up easy
- See effort as the path to mastery instead of seeing it as fruitless
- Learn from criticism instead of ignoring useful negative feedback
- Find lessons and inspiration in the success of others instead of feeling threatened

The future of radiology lies in striking a harmonious balance between technology and humanity. As we continue to innovate and adapt to new challenges, it is essential to prioritize the well-being of practitioners. By embracing a growth mindset, fostering resilience, and cultivating a supportive work environment, we can ensure that radiology remains at the forefront of healthcare delivery, driving positive outcomes for patients for years to come.

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