

Radiologist Burnout



Physician burnout is a major health issue affecting not only radiologists but also other medical practitioners. A Medscape survey (January 2019) of 15,000+ doctors reveals an overall physician burnout rate of 44%, with urologists self-reporting the most burnout at 54% and radiologists placing a notch higher than the average at 45%.

Burnout is viewed as a work-related syndrome often accompanied with a loss of enthusiasm for work, depression, severe emotional exhaustion, and a sense of failure. Research shows burnout among doctors can diminish productivity and increase the risk of committing medical errors.

Jonathan Kruskal, MD, PhD, chair of the radiology executive committee at Harvard Medical School, suggests the need to tackle the current burnout crisis from a stress perspective.

"Stress can lead to burnout. Some physicians may be more resilient than others, but the fact that stress and burnout have led to physician suicide is sufficient for me, and hopefully my colleagues, to embrace this as a real and timely crisis," says Dr Kruskal.

Radiology leaders and experts point out the different "stressors" that are unique to the speciality, including the ever-increasing imaging volumes, turnaround time pressures, declining reimbursements per study, isolation in the work environment, and fear of job replacements due to technological advances.

While there has been increased awareness of physician burnout in recent years, sadly concerted efforts to combat or mitigate the problem seem to be lacking.

"These days, you can't open up a journal, go to a conference or even look at your social media feed without seeing something on the topic [of burnout]," according to Nisha Mehta, MD, a musculoskeletal and breast imaging radiologist at the VA health centre in Charlotte, NC. Although recognising the problem is a good thing, Dr Mehta says the "challenge now is how to address it" noting that across specialities, "we haven't done a great job at finding solutions to burnout that actually move the needle."

Wellness in the Workplace

According to Dr Kruskal, many radiology practices and departments tend to focus their attention on preventing burnout and not doing enough to promote wellness and welfare of staff. The two go hand in hand, he points out, hence the one-sided approach will not be effective in solving the burnout problem.

In addition, Dr Kruskal highlights the importance for radiology leaders to master the art of "identifying the manifestations of stress in the workplace." He cites as an example the art of handling "the disruptive physician." Instead of focusing on teaching people to be less disruptive or not disruptive at all, Dr Kruskal says leaders will do better tackling toxic behaviour head-on.

"There are many more subtle manifestations, such as loss of clinical productivity, loss of academic productivity, lack of interest in teaching, poor interpersonal communication skills and a host of other ways in which stress might manifest," notes Dr Kruskal, who is also radiology chair at Beth

Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

In an JACR article, "A Roadmap to Foster Wellness and Engagement in Our Workplace—A Report of the 2018 Summer Intersociety Meeting", Dr Kruskal and co-authors have cited 10 key factors that weaken wellness and resilience of physicians:

- Isolation in the workplace
- Excessive workload
- Lack of control over work schedule
- Inefficient practice
- Malpractice risk
- Lack of meaning in work
- Difficulty integrating personal and professional lives
- Inefficiency, clerical burden and intrusion of the electronic health record
- Loss of community or connection with colleagues
- Lack of alignment between altruistic motivation of individual physicians and the organisations in which they work

"I cannot overemphasise the importance of effective leadership" in controlling burnout in the future, Dr Kruskal adds. "Leaders are known to both mitigate and produce stress in the workplace. It's very important that our current and future leaders receive appropriate training and develop skills that allow them to identify stressors. They need to work at developing high-functioning teams."

Source: Radiology Business

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