
Addressing Burnout and Promoting Well-being in Women Breast Imaging



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Burnout, characterised by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal efficacy in the workplace, is a significant public health concern among physicians. Recent socioeconomic stressors and the pandemic have exacerbated this issue, particularly affecting women physicians. In radiology, 63% of women radiologists experience burnout compared to 46% of men. The reasons for this disparity may include fewer mentors, limited childbearing years, salary and promotion inequities, and higher rates of biases and harassment for women physicians. [A review recently published in the Journal of Breast Imaging](#) highlights how these factors disproportionately impact women physicians and specifically women breast imaging radiologists. Strategies to address these challenges are proposed to mitigate burnout, which could also benefit male breast imaging radiologists at risk of burnout.

Addressing Burnout and Retention Challenges in Breast Imaging Radiology

Breast imaging, a predominantly female subspecialty in radiology, faces the risk of losing talented professionals due to escalating burnout rates, which is concerning given the current and anticipated shortages of breast imaging radiologists. While individual factors contribute to burnout, systemic and organizational issues play a more significant role. The Mayo Model identifies seven major organizational factors contributing to physician burnout: work-life balance, control and flexibility, workload, resources, meaning in work, social support, and organizational culture. The authors identified challenges and matched them with proposals for solutions.

Work-life Integration

Difficulty in achieving work-life balance is a major stressor for breast imaging radiologists. Women in medicine face greater burnout, particularly due to challenges in controlling work-life integration and schedules. The optimal time for women physicians to have children coincides with their medical training, leading to delayed pregnancies and increased fertility issues. Postpartum integration is challenging due to limited parental leave and inadequate lactation support for medical residents. Women physicians often bear a disproportionate burden of domestic and caregiving responsibilities. Employers should implement generous parental leave policies, provide lactation spaces, and support breastfeeding. On-site childcare facilities and financial support for childcare during work-related travel should be provided. Employers should promote remote work opportunities, flexible work hours, and choice in assignments to enhance flexibility and control for physicians.

Control and Flexibility

Lack of flexibility and control over workload contributes significantly to burnout among women physicians. Women physicians often feel they have insufficient time for patient visits and less control over their schedules compared to men. Employers should explore remote work options and staggered work hours to increase flexibility. Systems allowing physicians to choose assignments and vacation days can enhance control and balance home responsibilities.

Workload and Job Demands

Working too fast and increasing clinical, administrative, and academic pressures are significant stressors for breast imaging radiologists. Women physicians tend to take on more non-revenue-generating tasks, leading to increased workload. Employers can quantify non-revenue-generating activities to support future payment models. Diverse leadership can advocate for workload changes that consider the specific needs of women physicians. Improving workplace efficiency and workflow can help manage workload and reduce stress.

Efficiency and Resources

The evolving role of breast imaging radiologists leads to potential workflow inefficiencies. Increasing complexities in breast imaging require better efficiency and appropriate resources. Analytic approaches can identify and address workflow bottlenecks and inefficiencies. Artificial intelligence can enhance breast imaging efficiency and value. Non-radiologist staff can supplement breast imaging radiologists to manage workload effectively.

Meaning in Work

Burnout rates are high among women breast imaging radiologists, but many also derive meaning from their work. Gender bias and disparities in academic medicine can undermine women physicians' sense of value and accomplishment. Organizations should address gender bias and promote inclusivity to maintain meaning at work. Opportunities to engage in meaningful aspects of breast imaging should be provided to enhance job satisfaction.

Social Support and Community

Social isolation and loneliness are increasing among radiologists, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women physicians may experience gendered microaggressions and imposter syndrome, affecting their self-esteem and sense of community. Creating a sense of community within the workplace through positive interactions and multidisciplinary collaborations can improve job satisfaction. Employers can support social connections through physician lounges, discussion groups, and social events.

Organizational Culture and Values

Radiology remains male-dominated with significant gender pay gaps and underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Radiology departments should foster an equitable and inclusive culture by recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. Policies promoting work-life integration, mentorship programs, and training on unconscious bias and effective communication should be implemented to support women physicians and mitigate burnout.

Source &Image Credit : [Journal of Breast Imaging](#)

Reference :

Katerina Dodelzon, Hannah S Milch, Lisa A Mullen et al., Factors Contributing to Disproportionate Burnout in Women Breast Imaging Radiologists: A Review, Journal of Breast Imaging, Volume 6, Issue 2, March-April 2024, Pages 124–132, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jbi/wbad104>

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