

CASE STUDIES IN WELL-BEING

■ Wellness Walks



The breast imaging department, led by Dr. Bhole, takes its first wellness walk outside the downtown Northwestern campus.

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WHO

- Sonya Bhole, MD
- Vidushani Perera, MD
- Michelle Jordan, MD

WALKING TO REDUCE STRESS IN THE FACE OF A HEAVY WORKLOAD

When patients who delayed their mammograms and other imaging procedures due to the COVID-19 pandemic returned in full force, radiologist Sonya Bhole, MD, and radiology residents Vidushani Perera, MD, and Michelle Jordan, MD, and supporting staff were overwhelmed. Their solution? A walk around the block.

It all started one busy procedural day in July 2021 with several attendees, trainees and technologists within the breast imaging department. Bhole and her colleagues made a concerted effort to take a walk around the hospital in an attempt to reduce stress and create social connections, both of which help protect against burnout. Their desire was to be with people who care about each other and are willing to know more about one another beyond the fact that they're working together.

Jordan and Perera introduced and continued this concept with their co-residents in other rotations, inviting them to take walks before conferences. One of the challenges was to get people to give up a portion of what might be their lunch time, their "own" time. This time is especially precious as members of the department would often skip or work through lunch to meet workload demands, so it was also difficult to balance clinical responsibilities with the concept of taking a break.

OUTCOME: Bhole, Perera and Jordan used the Perceived Stress Scale, originally developed in 1983, to determine how the walks affected stress. Over the first couple of months, there was a reduction in perceived stress by participants who regularly took walks. The crew administered the measurement before the walk and then after. There was an average reduction from 5 to 3 in perceived stress. Individuals would start their walk feeling stressed and return from the walk, sometimes laughing or talking with colleagues and an immediate reduction in stress.

“ **Movement during the workday has many positive health benefits, including mood improvement, increased energy and decreased feelings of burnout. A short 5-minute walk is something that all radiologists can add into their day, either alone or with their trainees and/or team to help promote overall well-being.** ”

Sonya Bhole, MD

LESSONS LEARNED

Even if you can't go as a group, investing time in yourself to take a break (a walk), can be beneficial. Additionally, instituting an intervention like this can show how leadership values well-being and makes it a part of the department or practice culture. It is sometimes difficult for a single person to introduce a wellness intervention in a busy department; the success of this intervention can be attributed to the two enthusiastic residents who pushed this concept forward, attracting and encouraging other residents to participate in wellness walks during busy work days.



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