Caring for the Reading Room; Combating COVID Related Stress and Anxiety Among Radiologists
Authors & Disclosures

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Background & Educational Objectives

Background: As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, radiologists have experienced significant changes in the nature and volume of their workload. This challenging transformation is further complicated by the COVID-related stress and anxiety felt by many in the healthcare field who are regularly exposed to the disease while they combat each new variant. In an attempt to mitigate the impact these stressors have, this project will review proven methods to combat these challenges with a special focus on addressing those specific to radiologists.

Educational Objectives:

- Discuss the main contributing factors to COVID related stress and anxiety among radiologists
- Review proven methods for combating these stresses and how they can be implemented into the the profession of radiology
Causes of Stress & Anxiety

- Changing workload & new pathologies
  - COVID has shown an ability to cause serious pulmonary pathologies as well as diseases in multiple other organ systems
  - Timely identification of these manifestations via radioimaging has become an integral part of the treatment process, which has placed a substantial burden on radiologists:
    - Increased diagnostic imaging has significantly added to the workload of radiologists
    - Radiologists have been tasked with rapidly recognizing all possible imaging findings of this novel disease, a challenge which is further complicated by the fact that the virus and its clinical presentation are continuously evolving.
Causes of Stress & Anxiety

● Personal and family health concerns
  ○ Like other members of the healthcare field, radiologists experience increased contact with infected individuals
  ○ Many experience fear of getting personally infected or bringing the disease home to their families and loved ones

● Isolation
  ○ Lockdowns and social distancing have led to decreased contact with colleagues and patients
  ○ Decreased human interaction has led to increased feelings of loneliness which further exacerbates the toll of other stressors
Combating the Stress & Anxiety

- Increasing intra/inter-professional collaboration
  - Regular conferences and meetings with fellow radiologists and other specialists to discuss COVID cases and any new or changing disease manifestations
  - In addition to decreasing feelings of isolation, this will improve diagnostic efficacy and patient care while easing the strain of added workload or unfamiliar case presentations
Combating the Stress & Anxiety

- Increase social and organizational support
  - Radiology departments and practices should have accessible mental health tools or services that physicians can use
    - Group discussions about new or ongoing sources of stress and anxiety
    - Dedicated time blocks for personal reflection and self-care activities including essentials like eating, drinking, and rest
    - Incorporation of recreational activities and relaxation exercises
    - Standardized and available systems in place for reporting mental health concerns

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Combating the Stress & Anxiety

- Strengthen personal resilience (resiliency training)
  - Proactive trainings to instill physicians with the self awareness and coping skills needed to effectively manage stress or anxiety should they arise
  - Studies have shown that individuals proficient in self-awareness and adaptive coping strategies have better overall health in addition to experiencing less depression, stress, and anxiety
  - These skills also contribute to a culture of compassion to both self and others, which are key components of a therapeutic environment
Conclusion

- There are multiple contributing factors to the increase in stress and anxiety experienced by radiologists and others in the healthcare field.
- Combating these sources of stress and anxiety can be effectively accomplished by fostering simple changes on both the institutional and individual level.
- Making these steps will have multiple important benefits including:
  - Improved quality of life and general health
  - Decrease in physician errors and better medical outcomes
  - Enhanced patient experience
