



Technologist Engagement, Part 2: Enhancing the Radiologist-Technologist Partnership

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Radiologists and technologists typically play the key clinical roles in a successful breast imaging practice. As with any effective partnership, the team members are responsible for the success of this alliance. Mutual respect, open communication, and a professional approach with the goal of keeping patients first lays a strong foundation for an excellent breast imaging team. To maintain a strong partnership, radiologists and technologists should focus on effective communication, a solid understanding of mutual patient-centered goals, and empathy toward colleagues.

Communication

The radiologist-technologist partnership relies on open communication among all clinicians within the department. To create a thriving environment while demonstrating a culture of engagement and safety, both groups must feel comfortable offering solutions to problems and processes, working toward a common goal of patient care.

The technologist plays a vital role as a liaison between the radiologist and the patient. Breast imaging is a high-anxiety setting because most patients recalled from a screening examination are nervous about the result. Technologists must ensure that the way they talk about the radiologist instills confidence in patients and makes them feel safe and well attended. “Managing up” is a common tool used during the introduction process and is essential to help create a positive first impression. Managing up teammates and departments allows patients to feel more confident in their caregivers and comfortable with the coordination of care. For example, when greeting a patient undergoing biopsy, the technologist can say, “[Doctor’s name] is performing your biopsy today. [He/she] is excellent at what [he/she] does and truly cares about [his/her] patients. You are in great hands today.”

Technologists also exercise their role as liaison when presenting diagnostic cases and pertinent patient history to the radiologist. As stated in the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists Standards of Ethics, “The Registered Technologist acts as an agent through observation and communication to obtain pertinent information for the physician to aid in the diagnosis and treatment of the patient.”¹ It is extremely important for technologists to obtain a focused clinical history, assess and document physical findings, and accurately deliver the information to the radiologist in a clear, concise manner.

Offering effective feedback is an essential tool that contributes to productive communication. Requests for additional imaging because of poor image quality, artifacts, or positioning errors should be viewed as opportunities for improvement.

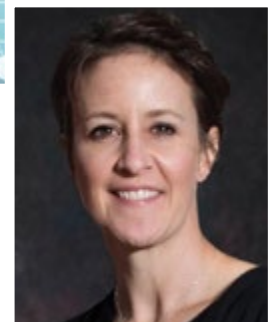
Radiologists and technologists can turn such interactions into positive learning experiences by encouraging open dialogue regarding the reasons for the technical callback and expectations for optimal outcomes. The radiologist-technologist partnership must recognize that a positive patient experience centered around compassion and empathy begins with the technologist.

This interaction may determine if a patient returns for additional screening or follow-up imaging. Suggestions for improving communication include the following:

- Encourage open lines of communication while establishing a safe environment where it is acceptable for all team members to speak up. Welcome ideas for improvement through a suggestion box or anonymized surveys and set goals for the team with morning huddles and weekly or monthly discussions.
- Model the behavior and communication style that you wish to see in teammates.
- Promote accountability through effective feedback to strengthen the level of trust between radiologists and technologists.

Mutual Goal

All staff members on the breast imaging team should work together toward the mutual goal of providing optimal patient care by acquiring high-quality images. Radiologists have a valuable opportunity to encourage and engage their technologists through quality image assessment. Enhancing engagement and motivating technologists can be accomplished with simple words of gratitude such as “Great work!” or “Fantastic images!” or “Thank you!” This



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can easily be accomplished by implementing a process of feedback and gratitude with a simple form (Figure) that can be printed, filled out, and exchanged between staff members or by setting up an online anonymized feedback form. Announcing a monthly caregiver champion who worked hard to provide exceptional patient care is another well-received award. Other ideas include the following:

- When a diagnostic workup or biopsy report yields a cancer diagnosis, share the case with the technologist(s) who obtained the patient’s images, offering words of gratitude for the quality images that allowed the critical diagnosis to be made.
- Share interesting cases, new technologies, and updated practices that have the potential to inspire staff members to perform their best work.
- Support opportunities for continuing education for technologists, such as hosting an annual continuing education conference with topics geared toward technologists.
- Invite technologists to departmental educational seminars, interesting case conferences, and journal clubs and provide lunch as an effective team-building experience.
- Establish and allow access to a shared teaching file.
- Invite staff to tumor board meetings.

Members of the breast imaging team often enjoy participating in activities such as these to promote team engagement. Finally, enlist the help of a lead technologist or manager to implement these ideas and to symbolize that these engaging activities are a priority for the team.

Colleague Empathy

As members of a caregiver team, radiologists and technologists hold themselves and their colleagues accountable for treating patients with a high level of compassion and empathy. However, team members sometimes neglect to treat each other in the same way. They focus on anticipating the needs of the patients to display empathy. In the same regard, they should anticipate each others’ needs to create a stronger partnership.

- If a team member (radiologist or technologist) seems stressed or just not themselves, simply asking “Are you okay?” or “What do you need from me today?” and listening with empathetic understanding builds a long-term and successful partnership.
- Understand the team’s needs and actively troubleshoot during difficult diagnostic workups or challenging procedures.
- Encourage wellness with consistent breaks to recharge and reenergize.

As individuals, our daily lives are filled with external life stressors that are mentally, physically, and emotionally challenging. Everyone has an underlying story that others are not aware of. To feel supported with a positive mindset based on learning, radiologists and technologists should treat each other with compassion and understanding. When radiologists lead the team and model empathetic behavior toward technologists and nursing colleagues, the technologists appreciate this behavior, which in turn strengthens the entire team. When empathy is displayed, communication comes from a place of gratitude and the common goal remains high-quality patient care. The foundation for high-quality imaging services is established by constructing a partnership between the radiologist and the technologist, resulting in the highest level of patient care.

Reference

1. American Registry of Radiologic Technologists. ARRT standards of ethics. September 1, 2021. Accessed September 17, 2021. <https://assets-us-01.kc-usercontent.com/406ac8c6-58e8-00b3-e3c1-0c312965deb2/eac1b19c-a45a-4e65-917b-922115ff2c15/arrt-standards-of-ethics.pdf>

Figure. Image feedback form