



# The Connection Between Mental Health and Workplace Injury

By Sarah Jacobs, BS, RT(R)(M)(CT)



When we hear the term *occupational hazard*, we tend to think of chemical or drug exposures, needlesticks, workplace violence, and physical injuries. However, in the last several years, workplace stress and anxiety has climbed to the top of the list of occupational hazards.<sup>1</sup> This shouldn't come as a surprise since the surgeon general announced in 2022 that toxic work environments are among the top five health crises in the United States. Atticus released a study last year that found that mental health concerns, including stress and anxiety, are among the most common workplace injuries, contributing to 52% of all reported workplace injury cases.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the alarming statistics regarding workplace stress and anxiety, searches for the terms *burnout* and *work-life balance* have sharply increased on the Google search engine during the past five years. Searches using these two terms have increased by more than 20% over the last two years, and *burnout* is searched approximately 823,000 times each month, according to Nigel Frank International, a Tenth Revolution Group company.<sup>3</sup>

Workplace anxiety and stress can result in depression, burnout, injury, quiet quitting, and eventually employees leaving their jobs. If this stress is overlooked and ignored, the effects are damaging, resulting in distracted employees who are less focused on the job at hand. This can lead to poor performance, other health concerns, and even injury due to interference with safe work practices. Maintaining safe work practices is essential to patient care and employee wellness. Even a minimal distraction in routine work practices can have significant consequences to the employee and the imaging team. Employees with mental health concerns are twice as likely as those with no mental health concerns to have an accident or injury while at work.<sup>4</sup> In addition to accidents and injuries, employees with mental health concerns may be more likely to take shortcuts and engage in hazardous behaviors such as being inattentive to standard practices, policies, and procedures that promote safety. For example, inattentive behavior could affect acquisition of a patient's health history. Technologists and staff members routinely ask for a patient's updated history during imaging examinations, and if these questions are overlooked or

answered inaccurately, an incorrect history and breast cancer risk assessment may be reported.

Breast imaging professionals have a strong desire to provide high-quality care, which can lead to a perfectionist attitude. Mammographic technologists in particular strive to continuously improve the image quality of the patient's current examination compared with the patient's previous examinations. Strict ACR and Mammography Quality Standards Act regulations are crucial to a successful, high-quality imaging center but can also contribute to this desire for perfectionism. Technologists, like many individuals working in service-providing industries such as patient care, are often people pleasers. Technologists aspire to please their interpreting radiologists, leadership teams, and patients while maintaining a kind and caring attitude. In the service industry, many employees are taught that the customer is always right. Working in health care leads to some of the same viewpoints. We aim to serve, please, and care for our patients. We are patient pleasers.

Signs that point to stress, anxiety, and burnout leading to workplace injury include the following:

- Cynicism: employees offering comments that signify a low sense of personal accomplishment
- Increased irritability and emotional exhaustion
- Reduced ability to manage emotions: may be easier to notice in colleagues with whom we have close connections than in ourselves
- Impaired judgment and general distractedness
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Disengagement in activities that are normally engaging, either at home or at work



Sarah Jacobs, BS,  
RT(R)(M)(CT)



How can you help?

- Encourage a comfortable environment that is open to discussions about mental health.
  - Perform monthly check-ins, asking personal questions about work-life harmony.
  - Cultivate trust and collaboration.
- Encourage wellness practices.
  - Take microbreaks (30- to 60-second breaks every 20 minutes) from repetitive tasks or postures, such as batch reading.
  - Go for a walk and stay active during breaks.
  - Avoid working through lunch hours and leave your department or work area during lunches and breaks.
- Build resilient employees.
  - Have compassion for each other, understanding that working in health care is physically and emotionally demanding.
  - Encourage communication through peer support or professional channels.
  - Plan off-the-clock activities outside your work environment, focusing on activities that bring relaxation, fulfillment, and joy.
  - Know your strengths. Consider taking a personality or strengths assessment every few years and build upon these strengths by taking a deep dive into the results.
  - Respect boundaries between working and nonworking hours for all employees.

Having open and honest conversations about mental health challenges can be difficult, but these conversations are crucial to maintain an inclusive environment where everyone feels safe discussing concerns. Being attentive to signs of stress and anxiety in our colleagues and in ourselves can lead to discussions and practices that promote wellness before injury happens.

#### References

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## 2025 Symposium Planning Committee: Behind the Scenes (continued from page 11)

### Industry Partners and the In-Person Meeting

The SBI symposium brings together radiologists and industry partners (vendors), providing unique opportunities for highly efficient and concentrated individual interactions at the largest gathering of breast radiologists in North America. Industry partners receive a prospectus detailing exhibit hall opportunities, sponsored learning sessions, signage options, and branded giveaways. Long-standing industry partners have first right of refusal in rebooking booths and additional sponsored opportunities for the upcoming annual symposium.

The SBI relies on revenue from industry partners to cover a significant percentage of the symposium meeting cost. In 2024, revenue from the exhibit hall covered a substantial portion of the symposium cost. Not surprisingly, industry partners prefer in-person over virtual exhibits and pay more to exhibit at a meeting with more in-person attendees. This is one of the reasons why the SBI symposium remains an in-person-only meeting. Dr. Lewin's President's Column<sup>2</sup> covered additional details on the dilemmas of virtual and hybrid meetings.

### Call to Action: Your Voice

The slogan for the 2025 symposium will be "40 Then. 40 Now" to commemorate the SBI's 40th anniversary and long-standing commitment to screening and early detection beginning at age 40 years. Although the 2025 symposium curriculum will be finalized 10 months before the symposium, we invite you to submit comments, feedback, and suggestions for the 2026 symposium content and speakers to [info@sbi-online.org](mailto:info@sbi-online.org) with "Attn: 2026 SBI Symposium" in the subject line.

Your voice matters. If you've filled out a past symposium attendee survey or submitted comments, thank you. Your voice has been and continues to be instrumental in shaping the SBI symposium.

### References

1. Belfi LM, Slanetz PJ, Cooke EA, et al. [Creativity, connection, and community: reimagining the radiology society meeting](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acra.2023.10.033). *Acad Radiol*. 2024;31(2):351-359. doi:10.1016/j.acra.2023.10.033
2. Lewin J. SBI News Winter 2023 President's Column. Society of Breast Imaging. January 31, 2023. Accessed June 27, 2024. <https://www.sbi-online.org/news/sbi-news-winter-2023-presidents-column>