



*You don't stop working because you want to retire, but because you have no choice. That means familiarizing yourself with the warning signs, the telltale clues that you need to get out of this racket.*

## On retiring

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If after a lifetime of practicing your craft as a radiologist, you've reached the point where your career is mainly in your rearview mirror, you may think about the R word more often than you'd like to admit. Don't play dumb. You all know what I mean by the R word. Not *rigor mortis*.

### *Retirement.*

There, I said it. Each and every one of you must come to terms with the ugly truth that you can't look or feel like Superman forever and that you won't always be able to solve the toughest cases faster than Sherlock Holmes. At some point, you have to ask yourself the five words that have been ticking in your head like a time bomb: *Is it time to quit?*

For those of you who don't want to ponder such weighty issues as *job satisfaction* or *quality of life*, a friend of a friend of a substitute instructor for Retirement 101 at a community college somewhere in Wyoming gave me a foolproof and amazingly simple formula for figuring out when to retire. Give it a try:

Take your age and multiply it by your savings (unless you're in academic radiology and have no savings). Then deduct 50 points for all the children you put through school, not realizing that higher education is inversely

related to their chances of finding a job. Now divide that number by a standard correction factor ( $\pi$ ) if, for some inexplicable reason, you never invested in Google or Facebook.

### Still with me?

Now, deduct 100 points for every malpractice lawsuit settled out of court because your own hospital attorney refused to defend you when YOU DID NOTHING WRONG. We're almost there. Assuming you have a loving spouse who's threatened to commit suicide or homicide (not in that order) if you ever retire, deduct 500 points while removing any handguns, sharp objects, and other household items that could serve as deadly projectiles from your place of domicile. Last but not least, if you're 90 years old or over and still take weekend call, deduct 1,000 points and find a better job.

Done! If your final number is—on second thought, numbers never add up. Time to start over.

The simple reality is you can't retire just because it *feels* right. What if, after years of careful planning, it turns out you don't enjoy collecting empty beer cans or rearranging your underwear drawer or watching all 635 episodes of *Gunslinger* on Netflix? What if

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your loving spouse can't stand the thought of having you around ALL THE TIME and decides to have you committed or, worse, finds another handgun? Then what? The problem with retiring is there's no going back. Unless, that is, you do. But are you really willing to relearn radiology from scratch after forgetting everything you ever knew while being retired an entire week? OK. Stop hyperventilating. It's not as bad as it sounds. Let's think this through again.

You don't stop working because you want to retire, but because you have no choice. That means familiarizing yourself with the warning signs, the telltale clues that you need to get out of this racket. Here are the big ones: Is everyone else in the practice your age or older currently deceased? Do you repeat yourself because of memory lapses? By the time you finish a dictation, are you short of breath? Are your cataracts making it more difficult for you to see the corners of the image? Are you nodding off at your own competency hearings? Do you repeat yourself because of memory lapses? If two or more of these warning signs apply to you, it's time to think about retiring. If all six apply, stop reading and go sign the retirement papers.

But what if none of those warning signs rings a bell? Maybe no one at work is shouting, "Danger, Will Robinson!"

That doesn't mean you can't retire. Even if you're still at the top of your game and remain marginally qualified to practice radiology, you don't need to work until you drop. Retirement can be your salvation. You might even enjoy it. What's not to like about relaxing in a comfortable rocker by the window? Who knows? It might be fun counting the number of blades of grass on your front lawn. If, by some fluke, you don't own a rocker, you can memorize the want ads in the local paper, take long strolls in your neighborhood (be sure your cell phone has a GPS for the return trip), and cruise the local strip in your rebuilt Thunderbird, assuming the DMV hasn't already revoked your license at the request of your highly educated children.

In the interest of full disclosure, a recent study in an open access journal somewhere on the Internet showed that mental and physical activity can slow the aging process of your brain, increasing your longevity and quality of life. This means that after you retire, mental and physical activity like rearranging your underwear drawer and watching Gunsmoke reruns on Netflix is all that keeps your brain from turning to mush. Am I losing you? Uh, oh. I was afraid of this. It's already begun.

Until next time.