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A good tech-rad relationship is vital to patient care

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In a resource-constrained healthcare environment, where we're challenged to squeeze more and more value out of smaller workforces, the technologist-radiologist relationship is an essential connection point in radiology.

The technologist is often the main contact for the patient, acting as the public face of the hospital and largely having the greatest impact on the imaging experience of patients and their families. Radiologists rarely come into contact with patients, but they play a key role in determining the optimal level of care. As a result, the optimized interaction of the two helps achieve the ultimate goal of delivering the best possible patient care.

Greater patient satisfaction fostered by better communication

By virtue of their daily experience with patients, technologists often best understand the patients' emotional state and needs and can use that knowledge to tailor preparation for the exam. For example, if the patient seems more critically ill than expected, the technologist can work to expedite the exam. If the patient seems excessively anxious, the technologist can use multiple strategies to help reduce their anxiety. This information can also be valuable to the radiologist. He or she may look closer at the ill-appearing

patient's exam for a critical finding that needs additional imaging, or instruct the technologist to perform more motion-resistant imaging protocols for the anxious patient.

While a patient is with them, technologists can readily learn things that radiologists can't because they haven't met with them. This insight and interaction is crucial, as it can help narrow down image interpretations in some cases. Take, for example, a facial abnormality that could affect image interpretation. By communicating regularly, the technologist would share this clinical information with the radiologist, who could then render a more precise diagnosis.

More accurate image acquisition and diagnosis

Another key area in which the technologist-radiologist relationship can have a major impact is in acquiring accurate diagnostic images. As radiology becomes more specialized and technology becomes more complex, the technologist – as the hands-on user – has a better understanding of the capabilities of the MRI or CT scanning equipment and the new techniques that can augment or improve standard or advanced imaging. Radiologists understand disease processes and how they should look on images, but they don't always know the nuances of acquiring those

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Tips for millennial technologists

- **Be a story teller** – Give patients examples of what you accomplish during an imaging exam, and how other patients feel like a hero when they are finished. Let them hear about other patient success stories.
- **Help patients cope** – Make suggestions to help your patients get through the exam. For example, you can recommend that patients undergoing an MRI exam imagine they are on a spaceship journey, think about their favorite movie, or recall places they feel safe and comfortable.
- **Identify with patients** – When you can, learn what it's like to have the same imaging exam. In MRI, for example, get in the machine yourself so you can tell them from first-hand experience what to expect.

Tips for millennial radiologists

- **Do what's right for the patient** – At critical decision points, ask yourself, "If this was my child, what would I want?" There's a person behind every image.
- **Pursue face-to-face interaction** – There is enormous value to be gained by interacting directly with the teams you work with for insight. Don't avoid them.
- **Find purpose in the challenge** – There's lots of pressure as radiologists try to synthesize large amounts of data and puzzling variables to make decisions quickly. Pursue the job because it means something to find answers that often provide life-saving results for patients.

images. In this way, technologists have an important role in radiology because they are the collector of the data. Radiologists may know what they want to see, but technologists best know how to help them see it.

Technologists are the experts in manipulating the imaging equipment to produce the highest quality results in the most efficient manner. Radiologists are the experts in what modality best delineates potential findings or abnormalities in various medical conditions. Both sides make a valuable contribution to obtaining a definitive diagnosis; that is what patients want most – an answer that leads them to either the peace of mind of a negative test result or the next step to treatment.

Higher-level clinical care through better information sharing

Close communication also leads to better emotional intelligence between technologist and radiologist as they begin to develop an awareness of the

information that is important to each other so that they can do their jobs better individually. It's not always possible for radiologists to be at the point of care; a technologist that can understand the needs of the radiologist can add a lot of value.

Part of that understanding includes the radiologist's responsibility to inform the technologist not only what they're looking for but also why they need it. This enables the technologist to make suggestions on how best to get the answer. Shared information leads to the highest level of clinical care.

Improved cost efficiency that starts with trust

When tech-rad relationships are strong, and bonds of trust are established, both sides have the opportunity to innovate better ways to do things and solve problems together. In the absence of mutual trust and respect, both sides may either feel inhibited or lack the motivation to go

beyond standard interaction and discussion. This limits innovation and, ultimately, stifles overall patient care and cost efficiency.

For example, the technologist in a good working relationship may make suggestions based on experience or recent observations to improve acquisition of a particular set of images. Similarly, when a radiologist can ask the technologist about some complicated technical factor, they can both be better able to improve on current imaging capabilities together.

Imaging plays an increasingly prominent role in how patients progress through a hospital system. As the technology advances and techniques improve, imaging exams will become less expensive, more data rich, and more accessible to patients. Consequently, smooth interaction between technologists and radiologists will become even more critical to increasing the quality of patient care within and across healthcare systems.