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The aging radiologist's wisdom, Part III: Knowing when to hang up the dark-adjust goggles

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"If you're a stupid young man, you're usually a stupid old man."

—William Shatner

I am overwhelmed at the extent of discussion regarding "physician burnout" these days. It is practically a growth industry, with all the feel-good folks telling physicians they are burned out and how they can move past it with some four-, five- or 10-point plan.

I understand burnout. I have experienced it. Many of us have. But, let's think critically about this for a minute: We practice in a healthcare system in turmoil; **EVERYONE** is working harder. We bow to multiple masters: the reimbursement system, the hospital, the patients, our bosses, our clinical and technical staff. We play everything we do against a thousand variables, and let's be honest, it wasn't always this way.

The system has morphed, and we radiologists are now, to steal a phrase, the canary in the coal mine". It all rests on our heads. We are smart people, but we can't figure a way out. All that wellness training and other outlets for temporary reprieve from burnout are exactly that: temporary. Why? Because you have to come back to the same work situation you left behind. There may be a solution to the healthcare puzzle, but many of us won't live to see it.

However, we **CAN** escape this rat race upon achieving a certain age. Retirement.

I have worked with people who literally (no joke) died at their desk in the hospital many years past a reasonable age of retirement. I

also know radiologists who don't have plans to retire. They want to keep working, presumably until that desk thing happens. Or until they can't get re-credentialed because they can't see the computer screen well enough to read all the materials for accreditation. Maybe even until they just can't find the right elevator to radiology. Wow.

I have **NEVER** loved a job that much.

I have also spoken to radiologists who retired early (sigh), and here's the short, just from me: The early retirement folks are **WAY** happier.

I still do love my job. It's awesome. I write things. I mentor. I do the academic thing. And I think I provide very good clinical service.

But I'll tell you this: I **am not** working until 85. Or 80. Or even 70, for that matter. In fact, if I didn't have a very expensive ex-wife to maintain, I might be half-time already. My awesome new wife and I are carefully planning our pullback and slow-down strategy. And at some point, hopefully with a few, 10, or even more good years of fun and enjoyable life left to go, I can very happily tell the people I meet, "Yes, I used to be a radiologist, but I retired to spend time doing **nothing**." I won't even want to write book chapters anymore.

At that point, you can bet I will say to you all in this very same space: **YOU ALL** keep doing that good work, because I'm out of here. But until that day comes, I'm still here with you.

Keep doing that good work. Mahalo.

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