

RSNA 2021: Redefining Radiology by Creating Value, Valuing Diversity

Mary Beth Massat

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If there's a silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mary C Mahoney, MD, believes it's the lessons radiology has been taught about value—the value the field brings to health care, and the value it receives through the strength that comes from diversity

“It has opened our eyes to a lot of inefficiencies in our practices and workflows, and some alarming healthcare disparities,” says Dr Mahoney, president of the Radiological Society of North America (RSNA) and the opening session speaker of this year's 107th edition of the society's scientific assembly and annual meeting.

This, she says, “is a time to reflect on how we can mold and adapt our specialty to one that is vital and value-based. I think that will be dependent upon a heightened focus on service and patient-centered radiology.”

Dr Mahoney, who is also the Benjamin Felson Endowed Chair and Professor of Radiology at the University of Cincinnati (UC) College of Medicine in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Chief of Imaging Services at UC Health in Cincinnati, will focus her talk on the meeting theme, “Redefining Radiology,” calling on the need for new ideas and technologies to help provide global solutions to current healthcare challenges.

Defining Radiology's Value to Health Care

To this end, Monday's Plenary Speaker, James A Brink, MD, Chief of Enterprise Radiology at Mass General Brigham, an integrated health system in

Massachusetts, plans to home in on the importance of changing perceptions of radiology as a loss-leader to one of a value creating specialty.

“Value is all about delivering a quality product that is accompanied by an exceptional patient experience,” says Dr Brink, who is also the Juan M Taveras Professor of Radiology at Harvard Medical School and the Radiologist-in-Chief at Massachusetts General Hospital. “It is quality and experience relative to the cost of the product.”

Dr Brink will tap into his experience developing a roadmap for value-based radiology that grew out of a multi-society paper he co-authored with colleagues at the International Society for Strategic Studies in Radiology (IS3R).^{1,2}

According to the paper, medical imaging's value must encompass not just diagnosis but also patient management and the field's benefit to population health. The field must quantify its impact on patient outcomes and quality of life. Radiologists, moreover, must work together with referring physicians to ensure the appropriate use of medical imaging to help control costs.^{1,2}

Dr Brink will share an example of a strategic plan for building value in radiology that includes key metrics and variables related to performance and an understanding of the motivations and behaviors of patients, radiologists, referring physicians, and hospital stakeholders when pursuing value-based imaging that puts patients at the center of health care.

“At the end of the day, health care is about caring for patients and improving their lives,” Dr

RSNA Back, in Fine Form

Organizers say RSNA 2021 promises to embody all the excitement the medical imaging community has come to expect from radiology's biggest and most important meeting of the year.

More than 10,000 abstracts were submitted for the meeting, and many popular exhibits are expected to return, including the Discovery Theater, the Fast 5 presentations, the AI Showcase, and the Image Interpretation session. Attendees can also expect sessions centered on such topics as diversity, inclusion, and the pandemic's impact on medical imaging practice.

Everyone will be required to furnish proof of COVID-19 vaccination and to wear masks in all indoor public places.

As was the case even before last year's all-virtual meeting—attended by more than 29,000 clinicians and professionals—RSNA 2021 will offer a hybrid, in-person and virtual, meeting for those who cannot make the meeting or are uncomfortable attending in person. Live question-and-answer sessions are expected to be available, and all exhibits and scientific presentations will be accessible online until April 2022.

"Hybrid meetings are going to be the way of the future," says Mary C Mahoney, President of the RSNA. "Some will come to the meeting, where they can do the hands-on courses, meet with vendors, network and meet with colleagues. "Then they can attend the virtual meeting afterwards and will have access to the meeting content that they weren't able to get to while attending in person.

"They will actually sign up for both versions of the meeting and get the best of both worlds," she concluded.

Brink says. "If our infrastructure or hospital bureaucracy is already occupying the center, we need to move it out and make room for the patient."

Embracing Diversity and Inclusion

As they were at the RSNA's 2020 (all-virtual) meeting, diversity, equity, and inclusion are expected to be prominent topics in Chicago, particularly at Tuesday's scheduled plenary session.

Michele Johnson, MD, FACR, FASER, Professor of Radiology and Biomedical Imaging and of Neurosurgery, and Director of Interventional Radiology at Yale School of Medicine; and Christine Porath, PhD, tenured Professor at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business, will share their thoughts on ways radiologists can help to ensure professional, equitable patient care and a thriving work environment.

"There are barriers that are real and barriers that are perceived," says Dr Johnson, the first Black female full professor at Yale's School of Medicine. She recalled that when she graduated from residency in 1983, not many opportunities were available for women in private radiology practice. However, academic radiology afforded many opportunities, thanks to trailblazers like Beverly G Coleman, MD, FACR, current president of the American College of Radiology, whom she considers one of her role models.

"It is important to remember those that went in front of you and pay that forward by providing opportunities or support to trainees or junior

faculty," Dr Johnson says. "No one gets successful by themselves."

"One responsibility we have to teach our trainees is to find that strength to speak up and be able to rise up with a little help from your friends and role models," she adds. "You need to be aware, learn to navigate and discover those strategies to help you move on. There are barriers and there are opportunities, and we each have a choice as to how we are going to look at our world."

Radiology leaders can also make an impact by getting to know their team members, she says.

"You don't need to be intrusive, but the faculty needs to know that their chair is supportive of them and that they are important to him or her as an individual—not just a slot in a schedule," she says, noting that she regularly joins a small group of faculty members, including her department chair, for lunch.

"We need those positive interactions to survive those difficult days, like a 65-case worklist," she quips. "In order for our patients to know us, we have to know each other and make the professional interaction more personal."

For her part, Dr Mahoney says she's eagerly anticipating the opportunity to get together with colleagues in person at the RSNA meeting for the first time in two years.

"It's been a really challenging and isolating year for us in so many ways," she says. "The pandemic has affected all of us, both personally and professionally. I'm looking forward to reconnecting with our colleagues from across the globe in Chicago."