



[Addressing Burnout at the Personal and Practice Levels: Five strategies every practice should consider](#)



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In the 2022 [Radiologist Lifestyle, Happiness and Burnout Report](#), researchers cite 49% of radiologists reported they are burned out, ranking eighth among 29 specialties.

I am not naïve—I understand the reality of the current healthcare environment. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to take a toll on our communities and our practices. We are working longer shifts than ever before and the demands of our careers are often on a head-on collision course with our personal lives. So, what do we *do* about it? Much has been written about mindfulness and self-care—and those are important strategies to address burnout. Beyond giving our colleagues tools to deploy personally, I believe we must take responsibility and steps to address burnout as leaders and ask what our practices can do as well.

Personal responsibility

To address burnout, we must first learn to identify it, and that begins with self-leadership. Self-leadership means understanding one's self and working to intentionally influence your own thinking, feelings and actions. We all see the world in nuanced ways. To understand your own lens, you can ask yourself: what are my personality traits? What are my biases? What past experiences do I bring to present situations? The key to success in these questions is being able to be honest with oneself and see the answers without judgment. The more we understand ourselves, the more we understand the context in which we see the world. By understanding our perceptions, we can begin to understand our behaviors. As an added benefit, by understanding how our lens of the world is different than others, we develop more patience and empathy for all of those around us who each hold their own perspectives.

Self-management is another critical component to address burnout on a personal level. By better understanding my thoughts and emotions, I can better manage my behaviors, my responses to difficult situations and frustrations of others. I can learn to respond rather than react.

For me, self-management often begins with the connection between mental wellbeing and physical wellbeing. The world is far more sedentary than it once was—and that can be particularly true for radiologists. It is critical to take time before or after work to engage in physical activity. For me, it is cycling. It often feels like there is a linear relationship between the miles I log each week and how resilient I am in other areas of my life. My work, my colleagues, my friends and my family all benefit when I make sure to include time for physical activity. Such wisdom can be credited to Roman Antiquity: “Mens Sana in Corpore Sano.”

Another key factor to burnout is the sense that others are working against us or are out of sync. I think we can and should all take on the personal responsibility of developing deeper levels of

empathy for others. As I become a more empathetic person, I can see how others may see the world and then see and/or approach situations differently. As we become more empathetic to others, ironically, we become more empathetic toward ourselves. The world becomes less challenging.

Finally, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, we recognize that isolation can lead to burnout. While working in an isolated setting can lead to increases in professional productivity, it is incredibly important to continue to develop and nurture relationships. Our brains are wired for connection, and we need support from others. Being conscious of our own support circles—how we can both receive and provide support for others—is vital to addressing burnout. When our support circles are healthy, we can share our experiences and we are reminded we are in this together.

Organizational responsibility

As physician burnout became an increasingly important topic in recent years, I noticed the conversation initially centered around individual responsibility. As time goes on, more and more authors are describing how vital it is for organizations, healthcare practices and teams to address the issue systemically. As individuals, we can all work toward higher levels of self-leadership, self-management and empathy, but I believe the whole of this work cannot be done at the individual level. Our practices can (and should) play a role. Here are five strategies every practice should consider:

1. Onboard people well.

As practices, it is critical to onboard physicians and support teammates with intentionality. Traditionally, a new team member joins the practice and meets others organically. However, in the new normal, incoming team members are joining practices at a time when meeting other teammates is a challenge. Remote and hybrid work environments are here to stay, and we must create onboarding experience to match. Creating person-to-person connection for our newest teammates is critical to teamwork and critical to burnout prevention.

2. Remove obstacles.

Radiology practices can take steps to reduce friction, allowing both clinicians and support teammates to work to their highest and best purpose. As a radiologist, my highest level of contribution is to interpret exams and collaborate with physician colleagues to provide the best possible care for our patients. When I am diverted from clinical work to address other issues, I am less able to lean into my purpose as a physician. Investing in support functions to allow every member of the team to lean into their individual talents is key to creating a culture of purpose-driven individuals, which—in turn—addresses burnout.

3. Inspire drive.

One of my favorite authors, Daniel Pink, writes about motivation. While we often think that compensation is at the forefront of motivation, Pink busts that myth and identifies purpose, autonomy and mastery as three key elements of motivation. When I think about these elements from a practice level, I ask: do we know our purpose? Do we offer autonomy? What are the elements of our practice where we need to be prescriptive and where can we do a better job to allow each member of the team the autonomy they need to excel within their space? How do we support the development of mastery? Do we encourage lifelong learning and skills-building? Individuals and practices thrive when purpose, autonomy and mastery are at the forefront.

4. Offer support.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to teach all of us lessons about ourselves and our teams. In radiology, many of us found ourselves working from home throughout the pandemic, and many are still working remotely. It is an opportunity for us as radiologists that many other physicians couldn't employ. We have learned that engaging teams remotely starts with incorporating innovative ideas about how, when and where people work. As we imagine a post-pandemic world, finding ways to continue to offer workplace flexibility while keeping our teams connected are key elements for preventing and addressing burnout.

I believe it is also critical to offer purposeful leadership development opportunities. At Radiology Partners (RP), we have an entire department dedicated to culture and leadership development. Through this team, we offer opportunities for clinicians and support teammates to expand their knowledge base and lead themselves and their teams more effectively. Through our Coaching Circles, radiologists and support teammates are offered dedicated time with 5-10 colleagues over a six-month period to connect, relate and help one another through peer-to-peer coaching. To-date, I have participated in two Coaching Circles and am now a facilitator. It is one of my greatest privileges within our practice. Our practice offers mentorship programs for incoming physicians. This creates opportunities for new colleagues to engage and for tenured colleagues to share knowledge and depth of experience with new members of the team.

5. Emphasize face-to-face connection.

Whether virtual or in-person, face-to-face connection is critical. At the height of the pandemic, we became well-versed in virtual meetings. At RP, we extended those meetings beyond standard business meetings and set-up dedicated virtual calls to discuss topics like mental wellbeing, physical wellbeing and large group coaching. We even set up online social events around holidays and occasionally offered fun competitions.

In my local practice, we began using our virtual meeting time not only to discuss important business items but to take time to celebrate our colleagues' personal milestones, like births, weddings and

graduations. These are just a few examples of ways practices can use the tools we already have to create supportive cultures and address burnout.

The pandemic has also reminded us how important it is to be in the same physical space as our colleagues. As COVID cases dropped in my community, members of my local practice were able to meet face-to-face at various points throughout the pandemic. While safety protocols were always at the forefront of these in-person interactions, I learned that even while masked and socially distanced, I was reenergized by seeing my colleagues in-person once again. I urge other practices to not underestimate the importance of in-person interaction to address burnout.

My call to action: we are all responsible for addressing burnout—as individuals and as practices. As individuals we can learn more about self-leadership, self-management and empathy and use our learning to address burnout within ourselves and how we interact with others. As practices, we can approach burnout systemically, deploying strategies and tactics to take care of our colleagues in more intentional ways. Isolated and alone, burnout is a formidable foe. Together, we can overcome.

Dr. Chris Mattern is a practicing neuroradiologist and Practice President of Greensboro Radiology. He also serves as Associate Chief Medical Officer for Radiologist Experience for [Radiology Partners](#). Additionally, he recently discussed burnout with [Diagnostic Imaging](#). Learn more about [Dr. Mattern](#), and connect with him on [LinkedIn](#) or follow him on Twitter [@ChrisMattern_MD](#). Radiology Partners is a leading physician-led and physician-owned radiology practice in the U.S. Learn more about our mission, values and practice principles at [RadPartners.com](#). For the latest news from RP, follow along on the RP [blog](#) and on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).