

Career Alternatives for Radiologists Beyond Clinical Practice

Jay R. Parikh, MD^a, Edward I. Bluth, MD^b

Abstract

Radiologists may choose or need to leave radiology as a career. The purpose of this article is to discuss options available to radiologists beyond their clinical careers.

Key Words: Transition, career, unemployment, radiologist, disruptive change

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INTRODUCTION

During the past four years, the annual survey by the ACR Commission on Human Resources has publicized the changing job market for radiologists in the United States. In 2014, job opportunities were limited [1]. In 2015, opportunities appeared to be improving but were still limited [2]. As a result of decreasing job availability, some radiologists are choosing to leave the profession.

Additional factors are having an impact on the radiology workforce. Some radiologists decide that they would simply like a change after 20 or 30 years in practice. Others experience job dissatisfaction [3] or burnout [4] or simply may not like their jobs [5]. Radiologists sometimes need to leave radiology as a career. Because of an injury, a radiologist may not be able to perform expected clinical duties. Episodes of impairment [6] may result in clinical privileges being temporarily or permanently suspended. A radiologist may have been cited in multiple lawsuits and therefore have difficulty finding a new position or obtaining privileges and malpractice insurance. Alternatively, a radiologist may have interpersonal conflicts with multiple groups or may have

been fired [7] and may no longer be able to find a position as a clinical radiologist.

Whatever the reason, radiologists are leaving the profession, and the ACR Commission on Human Resources is sensitive to this difficult time in radiologists' careers. This article provides information to help prepare our radiologist membership for careers beyond radiology.

PLAN AHEAD

Radiologists planning to leave radiology should consider the financial impact of a career change [8]. Reviewing current finances with a spouse, significant other and/or financial planner can be beneficial. Leveraging projected income and current savings against estimated future expenses can determine if a career change is fiscally responsible.

Several of the sequential steps previously recommended by the Commission on Human Resources [9] for career transitions within radiology apply to radiologists seeking careers beyond radiology. These include updating your curriculum vitae or résumé [10], leveraging your network [11], establishing a professional online profile [12], establishing a presence in radiology and nonradiology societies, conducting job searches, and undergoing job interview training [11,13].

One of the most fundamental considerations is whether a radiologist wants to pursue a career that is based on or independent of medicine.

CAREERS BASED ON MEDICINE

Nonclinical career opportunities based on medicine include positions related to health care administration,

^aDepartment of Radiology, University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, Texas.

^bOchsner Clinic Foundation and The University of Queensland, Department of Radiology, School of Medicine, Ochsner Clinical School, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Corresponding author and reprints: Edward I. Bluth, MD, Ochsner Clinic Foundation, and The University of Queensland, Department of Radiology, School of Medicine, Ochsner Clinical School, 1514 Jefferson Hwy, New Orleans, LA 70121; e-mail: ebluth@ochsner.org.

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medicolegal consulting, resource utilization management, research, medical writing and editing, and operational consulting.

Administrative and Management Positions

An increasing number of physicians are pursuing leadership roles in health care [14]. Radiologists aspiring to leadership roles in hospitals or health care systems can gain experience by serving on hospital and radiology department committees [15] such as workflow standardization, quality, radiation safety, and utilization management. Interdisciplinary committees such as cancer committees and continuing medical education program committees also provide opportunities for experience. Over time, radiologists can serve on hospital-wide committees such as credentialing, peer review, medical discipline, physician behavior, medical mortality, and resource utilization. Serving on a medical executive committee in some capacity is a possible segue into full-time administrative roles such as chief medical officer, chief quality officer, chief operational officer, and chief executive officer.

Often, radiologists will better qualify for administrative positions after formal management training. The Radiology Leadership Institute of the ACR offers leadership training specifically tailored for radiologists [16]. The American Association for Physician Leadership also provides leadership training for physicians, independent of specialty [14]. More formal educational degrees, such as a master's in business administration, health administration, or medical management, may also assist radiologists in becoming more marketable for administrative careers.

Advantages of this career are the reasonably high income and leadership roles. Disadvantages of this role include the time and expense required for additional education and distrust of former colleagues of your new role [15].

Medicolegal Consultant

Some radiologists choose to become involved in expert medicolegal work. Typically, these types of cases focus on determining if a radiologist stayed within or fell below the standard of care during the management of a patient who had an adverse outcome. Often there is a gray area, and experts for both the plaintiff and defense are contracted to help define standards of care [17]. Depending on the complexity of the case and the abilities of the consultation radiologist, involvement ranges from brief image and report review to complete review of the

medical record and providing depositions and trial testimony.

Radiologists interested in pursuing this career should both educate and market themselves. Attending law classes to learn the fundamentals of tort law and physician negligence helps establish credibility. Attending legal continuing education seminars and interfacing with plaintiff and defense attorneys are opportunities to build your network. Informing your radiology colleagues at local, regional, and national radiology society meetings of your interest may be helpful. A radiologist who is established in this line of work and willing to serve as a mentor can be an invaluable resource for a beginning radiologist expert witness.

Advantages of this career choice are potentially high income [18] with little risk to the consultation radiologist [19]. This type of career choice, however, may make a radiologist unpopular with his or her peers.

Resource Utilization Management

Radiologists can be effective medical directors for insurance payers. Since passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and the introduction of accountable care organizations, value-based imaging inherently has the goal of the right patient undergoing the right examination at the right time. Avoiding unnecessary imaging tests and reducing radiation exposure are consistent with themes of the ACR's Imaging 3.0™. The need for such expertise will likely increase in the next few years. Radiologists can use their experience to guide ordering physicians to the appropriate imaging study for a clinical indication using ACR Practice Parameters and ACR Appropriateness Criteria®.

Radiologists interested in this career path would benefit from serving on radiology utilization or hospital resource utilization committees to gain experience and being familiar with the ACR Practice Parameters and ACR Appropriateness Criteria. Formal continuing medical education courses in resource utilization and serving in hospital roles such as chief utilization officer can be valuable training for this career.

Advantages of this career path include the professional satisfaction of being able to promote patient quality and safety, a reasonable steady income, and a predictable lifestyle. Disadvantages include dealing with some contentious referring physicians [15] and participating in a process many physicians view as unpopular and hold in low regard.

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