2026 SDMS Annual Conference

Exploring Work-Related MSK Discomfort Trajectories in Sonographers



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Society for Diagnostic Medical Sonography Annual Conference

Abdominal+ Track: Friday, September 25, 2026

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- Financial support for this research was provided by the members of the **WRMSD Grand Challenge Alliance**:
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Session Objectives

- Describe trajectories of work-related discomfort in the shoulder, neck, and hand/wrist among sonographers.
- Identify differences in work systems and process factors associated with varied discomfort trajectories.
- Discuss significant relationships of overall work patterns and individual experiences related to the trajectories.
- Explore ways of supporting one another as part of a broader culture of care in sonography workplaces.

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2026 SDMS Annual Conference

WRMSD Grand Challenge

Longitudinal Survey Study



The Value of Conducting a Longitudinal Study on Well-Being and Risk for Work-Related Musculoskeletal Injuries in Ultrasound Users

Journal of Diagnostic Medical Sonography 2022, Vol. 38(5) 474–480 © The Author(s) 2022 Article reuse guidelines: sagepub.com/journals-permissions DOI: 10.1177/87564793221091255 journals.sagepub.com/home/jdm SAGE

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The objective of this longitudinal work is to better understand **collective practice patterns** and examine the relationship of sonographic **work conditions and performance** to the user's health and well-being.

June/Nov 2021 → June 2022 → July 2023 → Aug 2024 → Sept 2025 → June 2026

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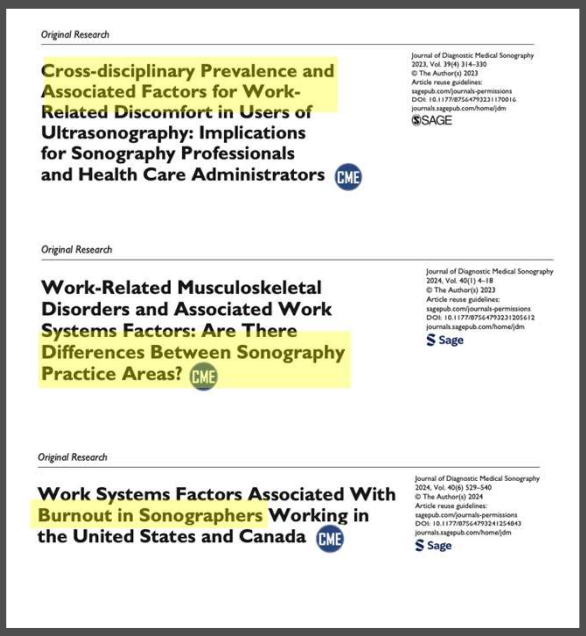

Original Research

Cross-disciplinary Prevalence and Associated Factors for Work-Related Discomfort in Users of Ultrasonography: Implications for Sonography Professionals and Health Care Administrators CME

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Original Research

Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders and Associated Work Systems Factors: Are There Differences Between Sonography Practice Areas? CME

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Original Research

Work Systems Factors Associated With Burnout in Sonographers Working in the United States and Canada CME

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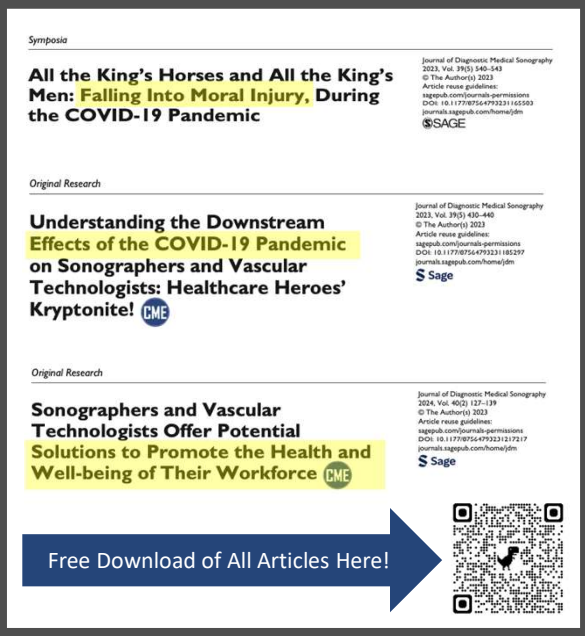

Symposia

All the King's Horses and All the King's Men: Falling Into Moral Injury, During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Original Research

Understanding the Downstream Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Sonographers and Vascular Technologists: Healthcare Heroes' Kryptonite! CME

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Original Research

Sonographers and Vascular Technologists Offer Potential Solutions to Promote the Health and Well-being of Their Workforce CME

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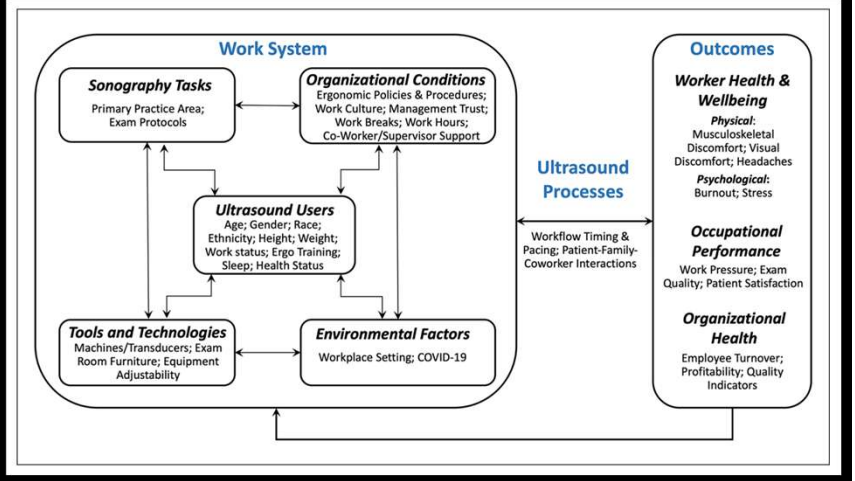
Sonography Work Systems Framework

Roll SC, Fukumura YE, Sommerich CM, Stigall-Weikle AN, Evans KD

Cross-disciplinary Prevalence and Associated Factors for Work-Related Discomfort in Users of Ultrasonography: Implications for Sonography Professionals and Health Care Administrators

Journal of Diagnostic Medical Sonography. 2023;39(4):314-330

doi:10.1177/87564793231170016



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Participant Flow Chart

Recruitment, enrollment, and retention of the longitudinal sonographer registry cohort

Initial contacts to registry (N≈100,000):
- ARDMS (n=89,905)
- SDMS (n=22,693)
- AIUM or ASE (n=11,544)
- And others

Consented to participate and started survey (June 2021) (n=6,172)

Excluded (n=2,603, 42.2%)
Reasons:
- Invalid job title (n=1,142)
- Retired, disabled, or student (n=328)
- Employed outside of US or Canada (n=87)
- Incomplete contact info (n=17)
- Duplicate responses (n=32)
- Incomplete responses (n=97)

Enrollment baseline (excluded from modeling) (n=3,659)

Initial WRMSD Measurement excluded due to measurement inconsistency

Analytic Baseline at 2nd survey (November 2021) (n=1,389)

Losses to follow-up (n=593, 42.7%)

Participants retained at 3rd survey (June 2022) (n=797)

Losses to follow-up (n=255, 32.0%)

Participants retained at 4th survey (July 2023) (n=542)

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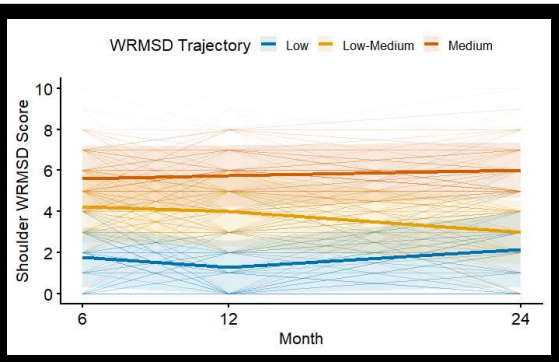
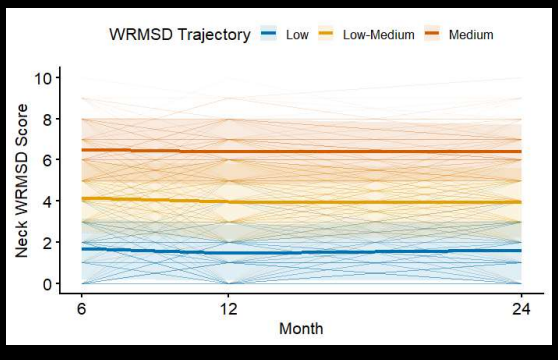
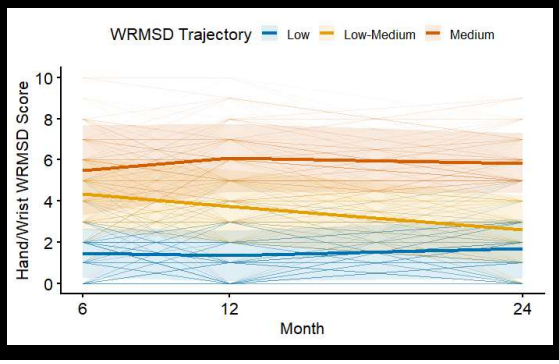
Statistically Modeled Work-Related Discomfort Trajectory Groups







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Hand/Wrist Discomfort Group Characteristics

	No Discomfort (n=82)	Minimal-Low (n=226)	Low-Moderate (n=106)	Moderate-High (n=128)	p-value
Sociodemographic Factors					
Obese, n (%)	22 (27.2)	73 (32.4)	33 (32.0)	43 (33.6)	0.80
Age, Years	50.0 (10.5)	48.3 (11.2)	46.7 (10.9)	50.0 (11.5)	0.09
Health and Well-being					
Overall Health Status (1-5)	**3.9 (0.7)**	**3.7 (0.8)**	**3.4 (0.8)**	**3.5 (0.7)**	**<0.001**
Sleep Hours (1-5)	**3.5 (0.9)**	**3.3 (0.8)**	**3.1 (0.9)**	**3.0 (0.9)**	**0.002**
Sleep Quality (1-5)	**3.1 (1.0)**	**2.8 (0.8)**	**2.8 (0.9)**	**2.7 (0.8)**	**0.001**
Work-related Burnout (0-10)	**4.0 (2.2)**	**4.8 (2.0)**	**5.5 (2.0)**	**5.9 (2.1)**	**<0.001**
Work Environment and Tasks					
Job Satisfaction (1-5)	**3.7 (1.2)**	**3.4 (1.2)**	**3.0 (1.1)**	**3.0 (1.2)**	**<0.001**
Work Culture (1-4)	2.2 (0.8)	2.2 (0.8)	2.1 (0.8)	2.2 (0.8)	0.85
Supervisor Support (1-4)	**2.6 (0.8)**	**2.4 (0.9)**	**2.2 (0.9)**	**2.3 (0.9)**	**0.02**
Coworker Support (1-4)	2.9 (0.8)	2.7 (0.7)	2.6 (0.8)	2.6 (0.8)	0.10
Work Ergonomics/Adjustability (per 10%)	7.8 (1.8)	7.3 (2.1)	7.3 (2.1)	7.6 (2.0)	0.25
Work Breaks (per 10%)	6.1 (2.8)	6.5 (2.7)	6.5 (2.4)	6.3 (2.7)	0.65
Work Timing and Pacing (per 10%)	5.2 (2.7)	5.3 (2.5)	5.5 (2.6)	5.3 (2.6)	0.78
Work Pressure and Performance (per 10%)	5.2 (2.4)	5.7 (2.5)	5.5 (2.9)	5.6 (2.7)	0.69

All groups experience lower overall health, sleep, burnout; job satisfaction and supervisor support impact moderate and high.

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Neck Discomfort Group Characteristics

	No Discomfort (n=77)	Minimal-Low (n=182)	Low-Moderate (n=183)	Moderate-High (n=100)	p-value
Sociodemographic Factors					
Obese, n (%)	20 (26.0)	60 (33.5)	59 (32.4)	32 (32.3)	0.69
Age, Years	50.4 (12.2)	48.6 (10.3)	48.0 (11.6)	48.6 (11.1)	0.45
Health and Well-being					
Overall Health Status (1-5)	**4.0 (0.8)**	**3.7 (0.8)**	**3.5 (0.7)**	**3.3 (0.8)**	**<0.001**
Sleep Hours (1-5)	3.4 (1.0)	3.3 (0.8)	3.2 (0.9)	3.1 (1.0)	0.11
Sleep Quality (1-5)	**3.2 (1.0)**	**2.9 (0.8)**	**2.7 (0.9)**	**2.6 (0.8)**	**<0.001**
Work-related Burnout (0-10)	**3.9 (2.3)**	**4.7 (1.9)**	**5.2 (1.9)**	**6.4 (2.2)**	**<0.001**
Work Environment and Tasks					
Job Satisfaction (1-5)	**3.6 (1.2)**	**3.4 (1.2)**	**3.3 (1.1)**	**2.8 (1.2)**	**<0.001**
Work Culture (1-4)	2.2 (0.8)	2.2 (0.8)	2.2 (0.8)	2.1 (0.8)	0.83
Supervisor Support (1-4)	**2.5 (0.9)**	**2.5 (0.9)**	**2.3 (0.9)**	**2.2 (0.9)**	**0.01**
Coworker Support (1-4)	**2.8 (0.8)**	**2.6 (0.8)**	**2.8 (0.8)**	**2.5 (0.8)**	**0.02**
Work Ergonomics/Adjustability (per 10%)	7.6 (2.0)	7.4 (2.2)	7.5 (2.0)	7.4 (2.1)	0.76
Work Breaks (per 10%)	6.1 (2.5)	6.5 (2.7)	6.3 (2.7)	6.6 (2.7)	0.68
Work Timing and Pacing (per 10%)	5.0 (2.5)	5.5 (2.6)	5.3 (2.7)	5.2 (2.4)	0.61
Work Pressure and Performance (per 10%)	5.3 (2.7)	5.6 (2.6)	5.5 (2.7)	5.6 (2.4)	0.85

All groups experience lower overall health, sleep, and burnout; moderate-to-high group lower support and satisfaction.

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Shoulder Discomfort Group Characteristics

	No Discomfort (n=45)	Minimal-Low (n=185)	Low-Moderate (n=104)	Moderate-High (n=208)	p-value
Sociodemographic Factors					
Obese, n (%)	12 (27.3)	52 (28.4)	35 (33.7)	72 (35.0)	0.48
Age, Years	52.2 (11.3)	48.5 (11.3)	48.7 (11.4)	48.0 (11.0)	0.15
Health and Well-being					
Overall Health Status (1-5)	**3.9 (0.8)**	**3.7 (0.8)**	**3.6 (0.8)**	**3.5 (0.7)**	**0.001**
Sleep Hours (1-5)	**3.6 (0.9)**	**3.2 (0.9)**	**3.4 (0.8)**	**3.1 (0.9)**	**<0.001**
Sleep Quality (1-5)	**3.3 (1.0)**	**2.8 (0.9)**	**2.9 (0.8)**	**2.7 (0.8)**	**<0.001**
Work-related Burnout (0-10)	**4.0 (2.3)**	**4.5 (2.1)**	**5.0 (2.0)**	**5.9 (2.0)**	**<0.001**
Work Environment and Tasks					
Job Satisfaction (1-5)	**3.9 (1.1)**	**3.5 (1.1)**	**3.4 (1.2)**	**2.9 (1.1)**	**<0.001**
Work Culture (1-4)	2.1 (0.8)	2.2 (0.8)	2.1 (0.9)	2.1 (0.8)	0.87
Supervisor Support (1-4)	**2.6 (0.7)**	**2.4 (0.9)**	**2.6 (0.9)**	**2.2 (0.9)**	**<0.001**
Coworker Support (1-4)	**3.0 (0.6)**	**2.7 (0.8)**	**2.8 (0.8)**	**2.5 (0.8)**	**0.002**
Work Ergonomics/Adjustability (per 10%)	7.6 (2.0)	7.5 (2.0)	7.5 (1.9)	7.3 (2.2)	0.81
Work Breaks (per 10%)	6.2 (2.6)	6.6 (2.6)	6.6 (2.6)	6.2 (2.7)	0.56
Work Timing and Pacing (per 10%)	**4.5 (2.9)**	**5.1 (2.5)**	**5.8 (2.5)**	**5.4 (2.5)**	**0.033**
Work Pressure and Performance (per 10%)	5.1 (2.6)	5.5 (2.7)	5.5 (2.9)	5.7 (2.5)	0.67

All groups experience lower overall health, sleep, burnout; job satisfaction, support, and workflow impact moderate and high.

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Creating a "Culture of Care" to Support Positive Well-being

- Our surveys and diary data have documented critical factors associated with elevated risks of physical discomfort and poor well-being.
- The risk of injury, the reduction of workload, and the impact of cognitive strain cannot be solved by you or your colleagues alone – it takes working together.
- Creating an ideal and supportive work culture can seem daunting and risky.
- It is vital to consider how to foster the desired work environment by leveraging the existing workplace framework to communicate support to colleagues and safely introduce innovative solutions.



Image generated using OpenAI's ChatGPT (DALL·E image model), 2025.

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Managing Discomfort Trajectories in the Real World

GOALS FOR THIS INTERACTIVE SESSION:

- Discuss significant relationships of overall work patterns and individual experiences related each of the four discomfort trajectory profiles.
- Explore ways of supporting one another as part of a broader culture of care in sonography workplaces.

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Case Vignettes

After orienting you to the 4 profiles, we will explore each one:

- **Describe**: We will share a brief overview of the work factors and outcomes associated with the discomfort trajectory group.
- **Scenario**: A vignette of a colleague in your sonography clinic, along with a recent incident or development related to that colleague, will be provided.
- **Think-Pair-Share**: You will have 2-3 minutes to think, partner with someone near you, and briefly share reflections or ideas about how we might employ a "culture of care" in the scenario.
- **Group Discussion**: After you T-P-S for each scenario, we will spend a few minutes hearing about the ideas that have emerged before moving on to the next profile.

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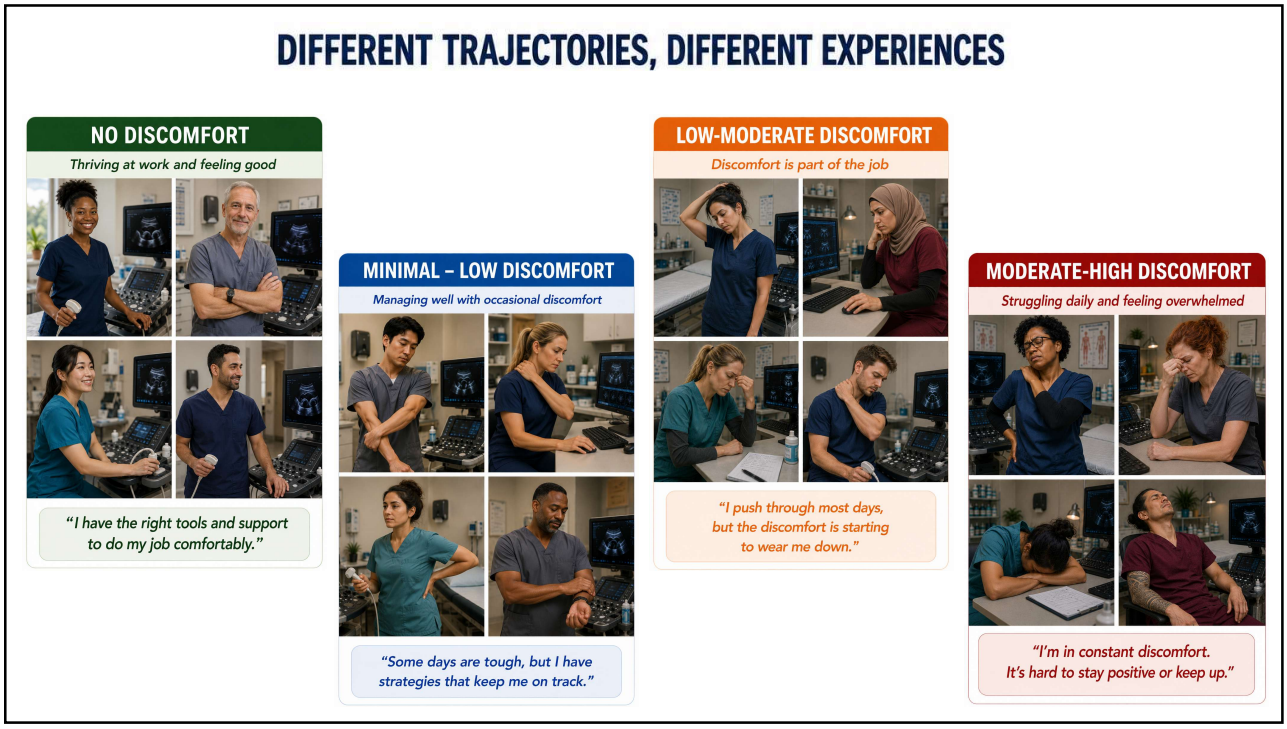

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No Discomfort



Overall Health
Excellent – Very Good

Sleep Quality
Good – Very Good

Coworker Support
High

Supervisor Support
High

WHAT HELPS THEM THRIVE

- ✓ Supportive colleagues and supervisors
- ✓ Good sleep and overall health
- ✓ Manageable workload and breaks
- ✓ Access to ergonomic equipment

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No Discomfort

A recent graduate has started working as a contingent sonographer in your department. During their onboarding, you observed that they completed exceptionally high-quality and efficient scans. After a lot of poor-performing fill-ins, finally, a highly competent individual to help when needed! You notice that they usually have a salad for lunch, frequently talk about their fitness routines, and often indicate how much they value the social aspects of their non-work life.

Initially, everyone really liked the new colleague; however, recently they have been very vocal in staff meetings that they see the whole emphasis on WRMSD as silly! They also recently confided to you that, rather than being unavailable, they have been avoiding weekend call hours because they need a full eight hours of sleep after their late nights out.

Situation: The lab director casually asked you and other team members about this new employee's commitment to the lab and whether they should be asked to pick up more hours and/or be considered for a regular part-time or full-time position.

Adding a highly skilled coworker familiar with your clinic would really help share the workload and relieve pressure on the team; what should we say or do?

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Overall Health
Good

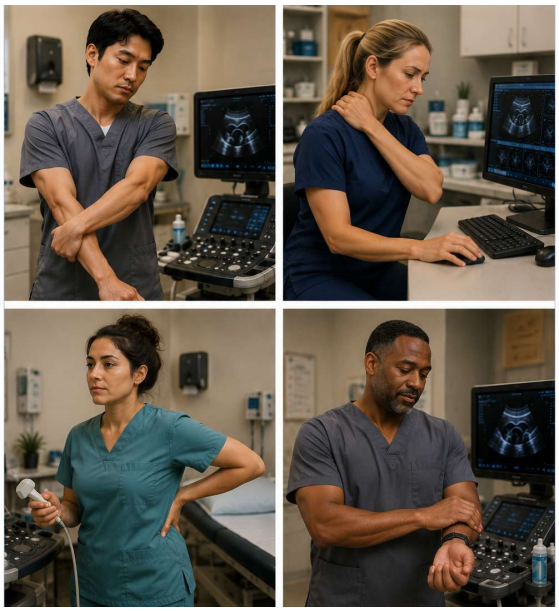
Sleep Quality
Fairly Good

Coworker Support
Moderate – High

Supervisor Support
Moderate – High

WHAT HELPS THEM STAY ON TRACK

- ✓ Positive work relationships
- ✓ Awareness and use of strategies
- ✓ Oocasional breaks and self-care
- ✓ Supportive leadership when needed



Minimal – Low Discomfort

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A coworker has been working full-time as a cardiac sonographer for 10 years since graduating. They really love working with students and almost always have a student tagging along during portable exams. You routinely observe them encouraging students to adopt good ergonomics and to take microbreaks to perform stretches between exams to reduce their risk of work-related injuries.

In staff meetings, our coworker is a great contributor to revising scan protocols and regularly volunteers to lead QA projects. They openly talk about the physical impact of the job, noting that they've started experiencing discomfort in their hands and wrists that is getting harder to manage and doesn't go away overnight.

Situation: This coworker has recently started talking about the possibility of seeking a faculty position to continue working with students and to avoid further physical problems before they worsen.

What kind of advice is best to offer while making sure our clinical team survives?

Minimal – Low Discomfort

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Low-Moderate Discomfort



Overall Health
Fair

Sleep Quality
Fair

Coworker Support
Low – Moderate

Supervisor Support
Low – Moderate

WHAT'S GETTING IN THE WAY

- Frequent pain and tension
- Poorer sleep and recovery
- Limited support and resources
- High workload, fewer breaks

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Low-Moderate Discomfort

One of our sonographers offered to move to the 2nd shift to fill a retirement vacancy. It was a relief to reduce the strain on the team, especially because this highly skilled sonographer just earned an RVT – now they can even complete VT studies in the ER! In staff meetings, they always talk about injuries and burnout, openly sharing that they drink a lot of coffee and take pain medications multiple times throughout their shift to help them stay focused and manage their neck and shoulder pain.

Recently, this colleague has confided to you that, despite the change in work hours, they still meet up with friends after work, which means they stay out much later. They also tell you that they have to wake up early in the morning to get their children ready for school, and they are having trouble falling back asleep. Moreover, they are finding it challenging to complete their regular errands before reporting for work.

Situation: A physician has begun complaining about the quality of scans completed on 2nd shift and is regularly asking 1st-shift staff to review or redo cases – this never happened before your colleague switched shifts.

Before this progresses and the sonographer is disciplined or your department gets flagged for review, what can we, as co-workers, recommend?

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Overall Health
Poor – Fair

Sleep Quality
Poor

Coworker Support
Low

Supervisor Support
Low

WHAT THEY NEED MOST

- Better pain management support
- Improved sleep and recovery
- Stronger support from others
- System-level changes to workload and work environment



Moderate-High Discomfort

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One of your co-workers has become someone few people want to interact with because they are always complaining. They are the former lead sonographer whom everyone used to look to as the reliable expert. However, recurrent rotator cuff pain and general weakness were affecting the quality of their work, and, to their credit, they recently stepped down to a part-time clinical role.

Even though they now work part-time, they are frequently heard complaining that they feel overwhelmed and burned out – you and your colleagues are universally frustrated. Across conversations with nearly everyone in the department, they have shared how they must keep working for 5 more years until they turn 67, and likely longer, because they need the supplemental income as the primary caregiver for a younger sibling with a developmental disability.

Situation: Everyone has started sharing things that they've overheard said to our students – "It's useless to use a cable brace," "You should take Advil every day before work so you don't end up like me," and "Do you really want to be a sonographer?"

What advice can we give our colleague, given that they are a seasoned, skilled, and (decreasingly) highly respected sonographer on our team?

Moderate-High Discomfort

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Debrief and Takeaway Application

- What ideas have been shared that you can take back to your clinic?
- Could you implement the same think-share-discuss process we used today at your workplace to support colleagues?
- What does creating a 'culture of care' look like at your workplace?
- What supports, processes, or resources does your employer provide?

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External Resource: SDMS Toolkit

https://www.sdms.org/resources/careers/workload-well-being-toolkit/workload-well-being-toolkit-checklists



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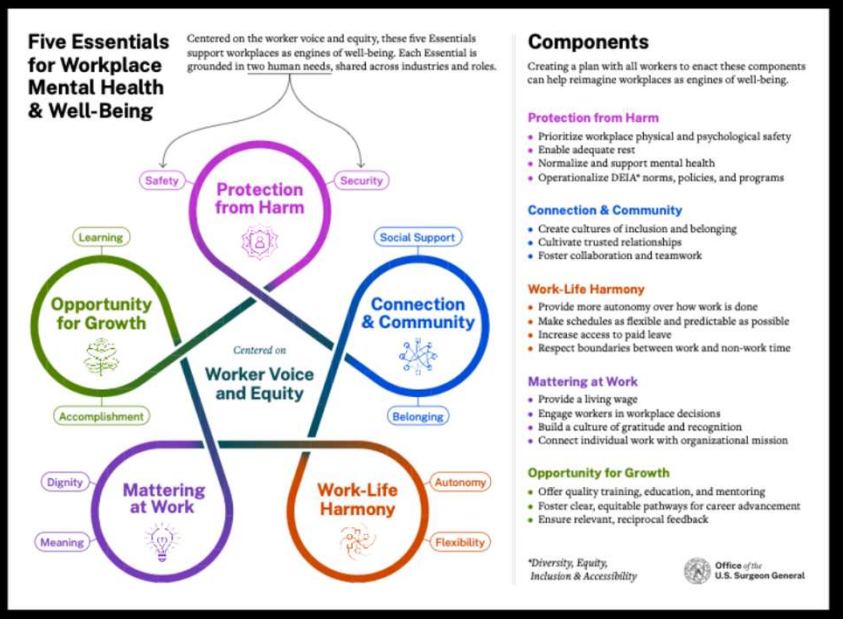
Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being

https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/workplace-well-being/index.html



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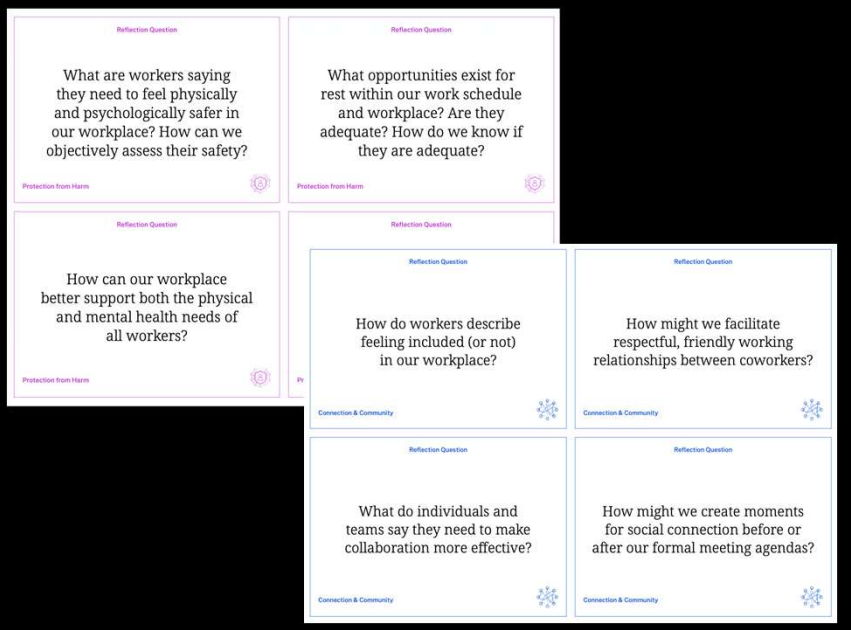
Reflection Questions for Workplace Well-Being

https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/reflection-questions-workplace-mental-health-well-being.pdf



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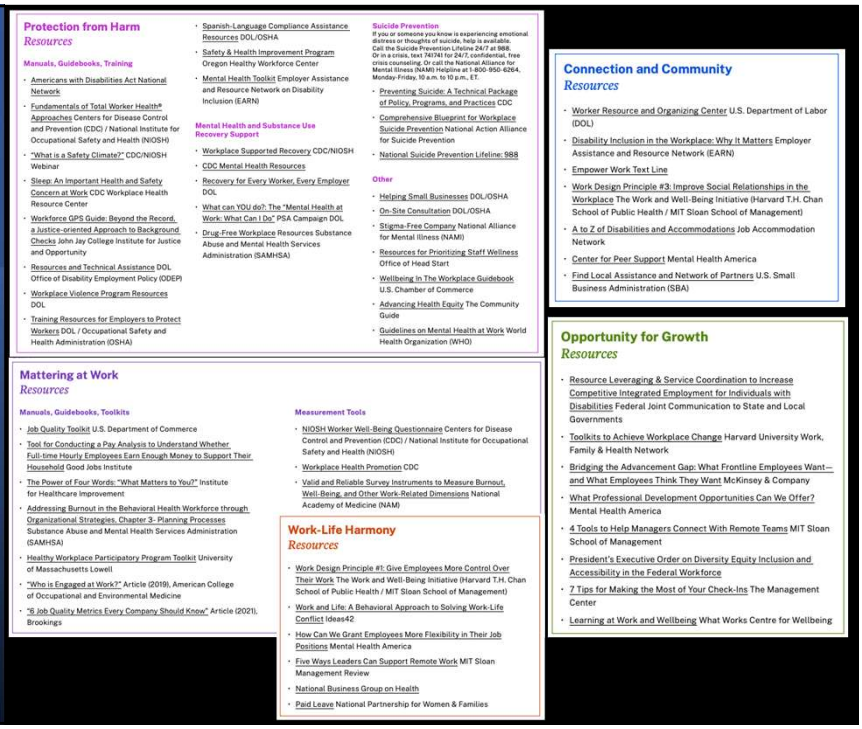
Resources for Workplace Well-Being

https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/workplace-well-being/resources/index.html



Protection from Harm
Resources

Manuals, Guidebooks, Training
- Americans with Disabilities Act National Network
- Fundamentals of Total Worker Health® Approaches Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) / National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
- "What is a Safety Climate?" CDC/NIOSH Webinar
- Sleep: An Important Health and Safety Concern at Work CDC Workplace Health Resource Center
- Workforce GPS Guide: Beyond the Record, a Justice-oriented Approach to Background Checks John Jay College Institute for Justice and Opportunity
- Resources and Technical Assistance DOL Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)
- Workplace Violence Program Resources DOL
- Training Resources for Employers to Protect Workers DOL / Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
- Spanish-Language Compliance Assistance Resources DOL/OSHA
- Safety & Health Improvement Program Oregon Healthy Workforce Center
- Mental Health Toolkit Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN)

Mental Health and Substance Use Recovery Support
- Workplace Supported Recovery CDC/NIOSH
- CDC Mental Health Resources
- Recovery for Every Worker, Every Employer DOL
- What can YOU do?: The "Mental Health at Work: What Can I Do" PSA Campaign DOL
- Drug-Free Workplace Resources Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Suicide Prevention
If you or someone you know is experiencing emotional distress or thoughts of suicide, help is available. Call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline 24/7 at 988. Or in a crisis, text 741741 for 24/7, confidential, free crisis counseling. Or call the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) Helpline at 1-800-950-6264, Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., ET.
- Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices CDC
- Comprehensive Blueprint for Workplace Suicide Prevention National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988

Other
- Helping Small Businesses DOL/OSHA
- On-Site Consultation DOL/OSHA
- Stigma-Free Company National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI)
- Resources for Prioritizing Staff Wellness Office of Head Start
- Wellbeing In The Workplace Guidebook U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- Advancing Health Equity The Community Guide
- Guidelines on Mental Health at Work World Health Organization (WHO)

Connection and Community
Resources
- Worker Resource and Organizing Center U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)
- Disability Inclusion in the Workplace: Why It Matters Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN)
- Empower Work Text Line
- Work Design Principle #3: Improve Social Relationships in the Workplace The Work and Well-Being Initiative (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health / MIT Sloan School of Management)
- A to Z of Disabilities and Accommodations Job Accommodation Network
- Center for Peer Support Mental Health America
- Find Local Assistance and Network of Partners U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)

Mattering at Work
Resources

Manuals, Guidebooks, Toolkits
- Job Quality Toolkit U.S. Department of Commerce
- Tool for Conducting a Pay Analysis to Understand Whether Full-time Hourly Employees Earn Enough Money to Support Their Household Good Jobs Institute
- The Power of Four Words: "What Matters to You?" Institute for Healthcare Improvement
- Addressing Burnout in the Behavioral Health Workforce through Organizational Strategies, Chapter 3- Planning Processes Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- Healthy Workplace Participatory Program Toolkit University of Massachusetts Lowell
- "Who is Engaged at Work?" Article (2019), American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine
- "6 Job Quality Metrics Every Company Should Know" Article (2021), Brookings

Measurement Tools
- NIOSH Worker Well-Being Questionnaire Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) / National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)
- Workplace Health Promotion CDC
- Valid and Reliable Survey Instruments to Measure Burnout, Well-Being, and Other Work-Related Dimensions National Academy of Medicine (NAM)

Work-Life Harmony
Resources
- Work Design Principle #1: Give Employees More Control Over Their Work The Work and Well-Being Initiative (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health / MIT Sloan School of Management)
- Work and Life: A Behavioral Approach to Solving Work-Life Conflict Ideas42
- How Can We Grant Employees More Flexibility in Their Job Positions Mental Health America
- Five Ways Leaders Can Support Remote Work MIT Sloan Management Review
- National Business Group on Health
- Paid Leave National Partnership for Women & Families

Opportunity for Growth
Resources
- Resource Leveraging & Service Coordination to Increase Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities Federal Joint Communication to State and Local Governments
- Toolkits to Achieve Workplace Change Harvard University Work, Family & Health Network
- Bridging the Advancement Gap: What Frontline Employees Want—and What Employees Think They Want McKinsey & Company
- What Professional Development Opportunities Can We Offer? Mental Health America
- 4 Tools to Help Managers Connect With Remote Teams MIT Sloan School of Management
- President's Executive Order on Diversity Equity Inclusion and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce
- 7 Tips for Making the Most of Your Check-Ins The Management Center
- Learning at Work and Wellbeing What Works Centre for Wellbeing

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