

Staffing Strategies for a Tightening Radiologist Hiring Market

A How-To Guide



Introduction

In conjunction with Merritt Hawkins, the nation's largest physician search and consulting firm, vRad is pleased to offer this practical guide to overcoming some of the challenges presented by the ever-tightening radiologist hiring market.

As a provider of teleradiology services to more than 2,100 client hospital, health system and radiology group facilities in all 50 states, vRad is well versed in the issues and implications associated with a radiologist shortage. Augmented with the expertise of Merritt Hawkins, this guide provides practical options for healthcare facilities and practices as they navigate the hurdles presented by this emerging challenge.

Thank you to Merritt Hawkins and to vRad's Kent Thomas, Vice President, Solutions and Tricia Sickmann, Vice President of Human Resources & Medical Services, for their expertise and contributions to this guide.

Table of Contents

[Radiologist demand is up. Is there enough supply?](#)

[Traditional Recruiting and Retention](#)

[Teleradiology](#)

[Locum Tenens](#)

[For More Information](#)



Radiologist demand is up. Is there enough supply?

In 2003, radiology was Merritt Hawkins' most requested search assignment. That demand was met with a plentiful supply of radiologists who were drawn to the specialty's high quality of life and potential for high earnings.

Within four years, however, factors including the strong supply of radiologists and the looming U.S. economic crisis began to erode the demand. And by 2012, requests to place radiologists fell out of Merritt Hawkins' top 20 search assignments for the first time in more than a decade.

Given the size and pervasive nature of radiology, this was a significant development.

But in 2016, radiology returned to Merritt Hawkins' rankings, and followed with an even stronger 2017. This trend is reflected in *The 2017 ACR Commission on Human Resources Workforce Survey*. "The 2017 ACR workforce study shows an optimistic picture and outlook for those seeking jobs as practicing radiologists in 2017. For practice leaders, the market will be much more competitive than it has been in past years." With the importance of radiology to patient care and an aging population, it was an inevitable rebound.

But will this renewed radiologist demand be met by an ample supply?

According to Merritt Hawkins' search data, close to 50 percent of radiologists are 55 and older and attrition is beginning to reduce the pool of available candidates. It's a supply shortage that isn't limited to rural areas. Communities of 100,000 people or more currently make up 55 percent of the firm's search assignments. Adding to the hiring equation challenge is the fact that the average base salaries are on the rise.

At the same time, an increasing number of radiologists are open to non-traditional employment options like teleradiology and locum tenens assignments.

Given these conditions, what are the options for healthcare facilities and medical practices?

Let's look at three of the most popular radiologist staffing options:

- traditional radiologist recruitment and retention
- teleradiology
- locum tenens

THE GROWING PHYSICIAN SHORTAGE

The shortage of radiologists mirrors the growing shortage of physicians in general. By 2030, the total physician shortage in the U.S. may reach 104,900. The shortage of "other specialists," including radiologists, is projected to be between 18,600 and 31,800 by 2030.

- 21,800 too few physicians today
- 65,500 too few physicians by 2020
- 90,400 too few physicians by 2025
- 104,900 too few physicians by 2030

Source: [Association of American Medical Colleges, March 2017](#)



Traditional Recruiting and Retention

If you're in charge of hiring and retaining radiologists, there's good news and bad news.

The good news—from a hiring perspective—is that radiologists, like all physicians, are probably open to new opportunities. The bad news—from a retention perspective—is that your radiologists are probably open to new opportunities.

Indeed, radiologists have one of the highest rates of relocation among physicians. (See “Annual physician relocation rates by specialty” sidebar on page 7.)

Fortunately, there is a single strategy that can help you address this double-edged sword: make your practice environment as efficient, open, rewarding, and appealing as possible.

Here are some tactics designed to help ensure that your practice is appealing to both your valuable existing radiologists and those you'd like to attract.

Conduct an objective review of the opportunity—and create a physician haven

Physicians are on the lookout for new and better opportunities.

Is the grass greener on your side of the fence?

Does your practice stand out?

How does it stand out?

Honestly evaluate your practice in four key areas and address any weaknesses:

- **Quality of life**
Do you provide CME opportunities? Are your call requirements in line with other practices? Do you offer the regular hours and vacations that today's physicians desire?
- **Quality of practice**
Do you provide modern, effective technology that helps radiologists perform at their peak? Do you have support teams to remove administrative burdens? Do you make it easy for physicians to consult on studies? Are workflows and technologies in place that allow radiologists to maximize their turnaround times? How do you help your radiologists avoid career-limiting medical malpractice and support them when litigation or board hearings become necessary?

“When evaluating our own practice, we identified that radiologists considering teleradiology worry about feeling disconnected from colleagues and the practice so we've implemented real-time case consultation, video phones, instant messaging, and other initiatives to make them feel part of the practice.”

Tricia Sickman, VP of Human Resources & Medical Services, vRad

- **Geographic location**
If you're not in a popular destination, maximize the resources your county or state may offer to "upsell" your location. Consider providing relocation assistance, job search assistance for the spouse, or a storage stipend while your new physician finds his or her new home.
- **Financial opportunity**
Do you provide attractive compensation? There are many sources of physician compensation data, including the Medical Group Management Association (MGMA), American Medical Group Association (AMGA), The Hay Group, Sullivan Cotter, Merritt Hawkins and others.

Using these areas of differentiation as a guide, create an environment that supports your physicians and contributes to their job satisfaction. From updated technology and quick turnaround times to the ability to quickly consult with referring physicians—create a physician haven.

Communicate your vision

Communicating your practice's vision can help new and existing physicians identify their place within the current and future practice and inspire their best efforts to help you achieve your goals.

Ask yourself:

Where do you want your practice or facility to be in two years? In five years? In ten years?

How are you likely to evolve as payment models evolve?

How would these scenarios impact your radiologists?

- **An Accountable Care Organization (ACO)?**
As an ACO, your radiologists would be part of an integrated system working with primary care doctors, coordinating patient care, often in the medical home model, and may even share financial risk inherent to captivated payments.
- **Bundled payments?**
Bundled payments would require your radiologists to be part of larger, integrated systems. These may include ACOs, hospital networks or large medical groups that have developed ways to "divide the pie" among clinicians providing various types of services.
- **Employed model?**
Radiologists in the employed model receive their paycheck from a hospital or other facility. This can affect their clinical autonomy, schedule flexibility, type of studies seen and more.
- **Traditional acute care?**
There is still opportunity for radiologists to work in private practice, in affiliation with one or more hospitals, running their own shop.
- **Outpatient?**
There are a growing number of "convenient care" settings such as urgent care centers with which radiologists can affiliate, sometimes as teleradiologists.

APPEALING TO MILLENNIALS

There's an entire new generation of radiologists entering the workforce. Do you know how to appeal to them?

1. Provide clear communication and feedback

Millennials thrive on clear, open and regular communication and are more likely to assume "no news is bad news." Let them know their contributions to your practice are valued.

2. Acknowledge flexible work schedules and arrangements

Millennials are a generation that has grown up with technology and the flexibility of completing their work from anywhere and at any time. Consider offering alternative ways of working, such as staggered shifts, remote reading, or job sharing.

3. Use engaging teaching styles

Give your training and communications efforts the best chance of being seen and heard by using the latest presentation styles, including web- and tablet-based formats.

4. Foster teamwork

Millennials find satisfaction working in teams, so foster an environment that incorporates collaboration and idea-sharing.

5. Mentor them

Mentoring provides real-time feedback that millennials value. It also allows them to make adjustments while giving supervisors the chance to acknowledge good work.

Learn More! [Teaching and Working With Millennial Trainees: Impact on Radiological Education and Work Performance](#), Journal of the American College of Radiology.

Bolster your onboarding activities

Set up your new radiologists for success—and happiness—through a robust, well-run onboarding program, which includes many of the following ingredients:

- **It begins well before a doctor arrives:** Make them feel a part of your practice even before they walk through the door. Begin sharing practice-wide communications with the new radiologist and including him or her in network building opportunities.
- **It's comprehensive:** In addition to thorough technology training, consider first-day support sessions and a formalized mentoring program for the first three to six months.
- **It addresses family needs:** Don't underestimate the importance of a happy family.
- **It offers a clear point of contact:** Ensure that recruiters make a hand-off to a liaison at the practice who is responsible for the radiologist's introduction (see "Did you know? Radiologist Advisor Program" sidebar on page 7).
- **It features clear and consistent communication:** Ensure your doctors know what to expect and when.
- **It uses onboarding checklists:** Tracking a new doctor's onboarding activities increases productivity, makes the new physician happier and offers cost savings.
- **It includes follow-up measures:** Survey new doctors 90 days after their start to gauge their feelings about their new practice. Read more about stay interviews, on page 7.

DID YOU KNOW? VRAD RADIOLOGIST ADVISOR PROGRAM

An important component of vRad's onboarding process is the Radiologist Advisor Program (RAP). Developed to offer built-in support for new radiologists even before they begin reading studies, the program pairs new radiologists with a current vRad radiologist for six months. As part of their work together, the duo completes 10 practice cases to help introduce the new radiologist to vRad's procedures and technology.

Implement stay interviews

After working so hard to identify and attract good radiologists to your practice, go the extra mile to ensure their transition goes smoothly.

- Conduct informal one-on-one meetings 30, 60, 90 and 180 days after the physician starts the new position.
- These should not be performance evaluations, but rather a casual and friendly exchange to learn how the physician is adapting to the new community.
- Explore how the doctor feels they fit in with others in the practice both clinically and philosophically.

ANNUAL PHYSICIAN RELOCATION RATES BY SPECIALITY

Urgent Care 19.9%
Pain Management 19.4%
Oncology 17.9%
Radiology 17.2%
Psychiatry 14.7%
Family Medicine 13.5%
General Surgery 11.2%
OB/GYN 10.7%
Internal Medicine 9.3%

Average 12.0%

*Source: SK&A Healthcare Provider Move Rates,
August 2015*



Teleradiology

As the supply of radiologists dwindles, hospitals and radiology practices are increasingly looking to teleradiology, in the form of a Virtual FTE, to fill both short- and long-term, day or nighttime needs with final reports.

Through advancements in technology and with an ever-growing track record of quality, teleradiology offers an attractive alternative to hiring full-time radiologists.

Among its most valuable benefits is the ability to help hospitals and practices deal with surges in imaging volumes and volatile staffing levels. The capability to seamlessly manage—essentially at the push of a button—such unpredictability helps provide better service to both doctors and patients.

At the same time, it helps lessen the harmful effects—on accuracy and morale—of an overworked radiology team. In fact, some hospitals and practices have begun to cite teleradiology partnerships in their recruiting efforts. The existence of such partnerships offers a strong message that the practice is committed to managing workloads and stress, and allowing its radiologists to focus on their important cases.

Other practices have simply turned to teleradiology as a less risky and more consistent alternative to the costly and time-consuming process of hiring. After incurring the significant cost to identify, recruit, license and train radiologists (see “Did you know?—The annual cost of a radiologist” on page 9), it’s difficult for practices to weather the jarring financial and patient-care effects of radiologist departures.

Balancing Act: A vRad vFTE Case Study

“Most new radiologists today are super sub-specialized and are only comfortable in their particular specialty,” says Roger Ramos, MD, Blue Radiology Services president. “If I only have 10 cases a day in their subspecialty, I can’t afford to pay them to read only those cases.”

At the same time, referring physicians want subspecialty reads.

It’s a balancing act that sent Ramos to vRad looking for help.

vRad’s Virtual Full Time Equivalent (vFTE) solution has been exactly what Ramos and his team needed, offering instant access to trained, reliable subspecialists while cutting costs.

Blue Radiology still brings in full-time radiologists when necessary, but turns to vRad’s vFTE in times when they might otherwise hire someone who doesn’t quite fit their needs.

Ramos says Blue Radiology also uses vFTE as a flexible tool for filling other schedule gaps such as vacation coverage, new contracts where only a partial FTE is needed, or to cover a retirement.

“vRad’s specialized radiologists speak the same language as the orthopedic surgeon, for example,” Ramos says. “That surgeon becomes comfortable with the radiologist and his or her reads, so it becomes a really strong relationship.”

DID YOU KNOW? THE ANNUAL COST OF A RADIOLOGIST

Along with salary and benefits, the annual cost of a staff radiologist, including recruiting, licensing and credentialing, covering medical malpractice insurance costs, and maintaining CME and certifications can be more than \$500,000.

Source: (from the vRad vFTE Solution & Valley Medical Center case study)

vRAD vFTE PROGRAM BENEFITS

Always available

vRad teleradiology partners offer their clients access to radiologists 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Saves money

A vRad teleradiologist provides reading capacity without burdening your practice with benefits, vacation, or other support demands.

Focused and efficient

vRad teleradiologists have support staff who complete their non-clinical tasks, allowing them to remain focused on what's important, reading.

Subspecialty capable

vRad offers a team of more than 500 U.S. board-certified teleradiologists, 70 percent of whom are subspecialty trained.



Locum Tenens

Latin for “holding place,” locum tenens are doing just that in increasing numbers for healthcare facilities and practices starved for physicians.

In the last 12 months, 96 percent of healthcare facilities have used locum tenens physicians. The overwhelming majority—43 percent—of these temporary providers are primary care physicians, with radiologists making up only 7 percent of the total. In 2016, 80 percent of hospitals that used locum tenens rated their value as worth the cost.

The supply of locum tenens has been buoyed by a growing number of doctors who are opting out of traditional practices due to dissatisfaction with the current healthcare environment. Many view work as a locum tenens as offering the opportunity to escape the politics and hassles that can accompany traditional work in a healthcare system.

But what are the benefits and drawbacks for practices and facilities that bring in locum tenens?

The following responses were offered by healthcare facilities and practices that have employed locum tenens in the past 12 months.

BENEFIT	Percentage of facilities/practices that view it as a benefit of using locum tenens
Allows continual treatment of patients	69%
Immediate availability	39%
Prevent revenue loss	37%
Prevent existing staff burnout	36%
Reduce medical errors/readmission	4%
Ensures quality-based reimbursement	4%
Cost	3%

DRAWBACK	Percentage of facilities/practices that view it as a drawback of using locum tenens
Cost	94%
Unfamiliarity with department/practice	52%
Learning equipment/procedures	43%
Managing multiple locum tenens staffing providers	35%
Credentialing issues	50%
Unable to bill for locum tenens services	20%

Source: *Staff Care—an AMN Healthcare company – 2017 Survey of Temporary Physician Staffing Trends*

For More Information

vRad extends its sincere gratitude to Merritt Hawkins for its partnership and many contributions to this guide.

Both vRad and Merritt Hawkins stand ready as resources for hospital systems, facilities and medical practices with questions or concerns about any aspect of the radiologist hiring challenge or any of the concepts presented in this guide.

Please use the contact information below to facilitate those conversations, questions or comments.

vRad vFTE

For more information on vRad's Virtual FTE solution, please visit:
<https://www.vrad.com/service/vfte/> or call 800.737.0610

vRad careers

For more information about radiologist career opportunities at vRad, please contact the vRad Physician Engagement Team at PhysicianEngagementTeam@vrad.com.

Merritt Hawkins recruiting and locum services

For more information about Merritt Hawkins' physician recruiting and locum services, please contact:

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<http://travisbsingleton.wixsite.com/publicationmentions>

MERRITT HAWKINS' 2017 REVIEW

Merritt Hawkins' 2017 Review of Physician and Advanced Practitioner Recruiting Incentives is now available to healthcare executives and others who follow physician recruiting trends.

Now in its 24th year, the Review is the definitive national benchmarking resource detailing the starting salaries, signing bonuses, production bonuses and other incentives currently being used to recruit physicians. In addition to a wide range of compelling data, the Review includes a detailed analysis of the demographic and social factors shaping the physician recruiting market today.

Read the Merritt Hawkins' 2017 Review of Physician and Advanced Practitioner Recruiting Incentives [here](#).

About vRad

vRad (Virtual Radiologic) is the leading national teleradiology services and telemedicine company, with 500+ U.S. board-certified and eligible physicians, 75% of whom are subspecialty trained. Its clinical expertise and evidence-based insight help clients make better decisions about the health of their patients and their imaging services.

vRad is a [MEDNAX](#) Company, a national health solutions partner specializing in neonatal and other pediatric services, anesthesia, radiology, pediatric cardiology and other physician and management services. vRad interprets and processes patient imaging studies on the world's largest and most advanced teleradiology PACS for 2,100 client hospital, health system and radiology group facilities in all 50 states. The practice has 17 issued patents for innovation in telemedicine workflow, and is a recognized leader in imaging analytics and deep learning-assisted diagnostics. It is also a past winner of [Frost & Sullivan's Visionary Innovation Award](#) for Medical Imaging Analytics (North America). For more information, please visit www.vrad.com. Follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#).