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Title: Charting the practical dimensions of understaffing from a managerial perspective:
everyday consequences of the UK's sonographer shortage

Authorship

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Abstract

Background: The Society and College of Radiographers reports that, by 2014, 18.1% of UK ultrasound vacancies remained unfilled, a substantial rise from the 10.9% reported in 2011, and the 10.1% reported in 2009.^[1,2] Indeed by 2013, the UK government's Migration Advisory Committee had listed sonography as an official 'shortage specialty'.^[3,4] The research reported herein is designed to lend qualitative depth to our current understanding of the "coal-face" situation in the UK's ultrasound units from the perspective of their managers.

Methods: Using a Straussian model of Grounded Theory,^[5,6] extended accounts provided by N=20 ultrasound department leads in public (n=17) and private (n=3) units were analysed.

Results: Three global themes emerged from the analysis. The first addresses how a lack of staff in the broader economy has created a migratory system that works chiefly to the advantage of the most junior and the most senior clinicians, often leaving mid-career professionals in a borderline impossible situation. The second highlights how the knowledge economy in many departments is being stymied by early retirement and late-career migration, rendering questions about how advanced expertise in ultrasound might be obtained and sustained by the remaining experienced clinicians. The third underscores how it is often workplace *instability*, rather than simple short staffing, that is most damaging to staff morale, planning capacity and clinical self-efficacy.

Conclusions: This work ideally opens up debates on some largely undiscussed practical contingencies of the sonographer shortage, and can help ground future deductive research in the real-world experience of key actors.

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