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“We’ve got 30 patients, so who’s working Saturday?” Seven ideological dilemmas for sonographers with work-related musculoskeletal disorders

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Abstract

Background: In the course of their work, clinicians across all spheres of healthcare are routinely faced with contradictions that should, in theory at least, prove to be intractable obstacles to ‘getting things done’. In practice, however, such ‘ideological dilemmas’ (Billig et al., 1988) seldom transpire to be insurmountable and, moreover, can be essential - and highly constructive - features in individuals’ everyday reasoning about self, (professional) identity and (working) environment. This paper qualitatively investigates a set of such ideological dilemmas that emerge from experienced sonographers’ accounts of experience with work and work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WRMSD).

Method: Detailed semi-structured interviews were conducted with N=9 sonographers, all working in the UK. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Miller, Booth and Spacey, 2019) indicated points of pragmatic ideological contradiction and participants’ sense-making around them.

Results: Analysis revealed seven common dilemmas: (a) Practical necessities versus WRMSD prevention techniques; (b) Being ill versus not being ill; (c) Increasing workload versus job pressure; (d) Self-care versus care of the group; (e) Needing to change versus needing to persevere; (f) Practical versus ethical judgement, and; (g) Self-preservation versus professional pride. In navigating these, participants were often able to find and reinforce their own sense of a committed, professional and agential self.

Conclusions: The findings have import for sonographers and other clinicians faced with contradictory voices and difficult choices around work and injury/illness, not least by highlighting the enabling elements of what might otherwise be viewed as a set of straightforward everyday barriers to both practice and wellbeing.

References

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