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Personnel flux and workplace anxiety: Personal and interpersonal consequences of understaffing in UK ultrasound departments

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Abstract

Introduction: By 2013, the UK government's Migration Advisory Committee had determined sonography to be a formal shortage specialty, and understaffing remains a key concern for research in the domain (Migration Advisory Committee, 2013; Waring *et al.*, 2018). This presentation, emergent of a qualitative study funded by Health Education North West, explores unit managers' perspectives on the present state of UK ultrasound. The focus herein falls upon the personal and interpersonal consequences of this circumstance for individuals working in specific understaffed departments.

Methods: A thematic analysis informed by a Straussian model of Grounded Theory was utilised (Sloane and Miller, 2017); N=20 extended accounts provided by ultrasound department leads in public (n=18) and private (n=2) units were collected and analysed accordingly.

Results: Two global themes are addressed herein. The first describes how both inter-departmental movement of senior sonographers and early retirement, within a nationally understaffed picture, impacts negatively upon local knowledge economies and lessens training opportunities. The second highlights how such staffing instabilities can undermine the day-to-

day self-efficacy of managerial staff and practicing sonographers alike, with both orders of individual reported to be persistently dealing with the stress of actual and potential departures. This is further reported to undermine team morale, and render planning for the future extremely problematic.

Conclusions: It is personnel flux, rather than simple short-staffing, that is reported to cause the greatest social-psychological problems for both managers and sonographers (Hudson and Shen, 2015). The issues raised herein require further examination from the perspective of sonographers themselves, in order to corroborate the views of the managers interviewed.

Keywords: grounded theory; qualitative analysis; social psychology; ultrasound

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