Workflow (Re)Constructed

How to build a radiology workflow that maximizes productivity and minimizes exam turnaround time.

The Challenge:

Despite best efforts, every radiology practice can experience a lull in productivity. This lull can be caused by several things.

- An endless list of exams is daunting to the radiologist and can be demotivating
- Demands for RVU output increases cherry picking and can create a culture of monitoring colleagues reading choices
- Poor worklist design can overwhelm some radiologists and leave others underutilized
- Being one of many in a large practice can cause radiologists to feel less relevant making it easier to let someone else pick up the slack

The natural response to these issues is often a desire to deploy a full load-balancing exam assignment solutions. This may seem like the best solution - each radiologist is assigned a fair share of all work and they are responsible for reading those exams. What could be wrong with that?

Here are some things to consider:

- You will increase your turnaround time. If every exam is assigned, you will not be able to ensure each exam is read within an optimal turnaround time. Imagine that the most important exam in the practice right now gets assigned to a radiologist who is stuck on a tough case. This exam will sit on the radiologists worklist when it could have been read by the next available radiologist.

- Full exam assignment can create reverse-cherry picking. In response to the scenario above, you might decide to unassign an exam that is about to meet its target turnaround time. Why do this? Why have an exam sit on a radiologist's worklist only to be unassigned and read by someone else when it is about to reach its SLA? Radiologists will quickly find that ignoring certain exams will mean they don't have to read them, creating an environment of reverse cherry picking.

The Best Design

The best worklist design is one that presents each radiologist with the work they should read, sorted according to the priorities of the radiology group and then fairly rewards radiologists for the work they complete.

Radiologists should be provided with real-time feedback of their productivity, radiology support teams should have tools to monitor all exams, and business leadership should have access to data and tools to monitor success and address any breakdown in the system.

Successful deployment requires a thoughtful and systematic approach to:

- How worklists are designed
- How radiologists are credited for their work
- How radiologists are supported in completing non-reading tasks
- How data can inform radiologists and improve the process

This guide will lead you through a worklist design that will ensure fair distribution of exams, simplify workflow for the radiologist, and help get your practice productivity back on track.

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Worklist Design

There are several approaches to designing the specific lists for your radiologists. This section will provide a framework for you to explore what works best for your group. Below is a description of worklists needed in each radiologists reading queue.

1. Overflow Worklist. Every practice has days or times of the day when they experience an influx of exams or some shifts get behind on important exams. An overflow worklist can be used to "call in the troops" when additional help is needed. An overflow worklist could be placed at the top of all or some shift's reading queues.The overflow worklist would only activate when overflow conditions are met.

2. Assigned to Me and My Groups. There will always be a need to assign specific exams to a radiologist or a group of radiologists. You may have ordering physicians who have a preference for who reads their exams. Or you may have subspecialties that need to be read by a subset of radiologists within a subspecialty group. The Assigned to Me and My Groups worklist captures any exam assigned to the radiologist and any exam assigned to the radiologist's groups.

3. Shift-specific Worklist. Each shift-specific lists defines the specific type of work that needs to be read by the radiologists covering the shift. Shift-specific work could be driven by a variety of needs:

- The radiologist working at the hospital may need to read all procedures for that hospital
- There could be software on the workstation for a particular shift that is required for reading certain types of exams
- The radiologist in a particular shift is continually needed to answer questions for the US techs in the adjacent room, so that radiologist should preferentially read the US studies for that location
- There may be many shifts where there is no shift specific work and this list is not needed

4. My Subspecialty. The My Subspecialty list will show all exams for the radiologist's subspecialty across the entire enterprise. When all other reading responsibilities are completed, radiologists can read from a subspecialty list. If you have a large practice covering many regions, you can build a subspecialty list with a regional reading preference, where subspecialists could read outside their region only when they are needed.

General. To ensure everyone has something to read, you can consider putting a list at the bottom of the radiologist's queue that includes exams that can read if their primary responsibilities are completed.

A Fair Measure of Work

The key component to ensuring radiologists are each contributing their share of the work is to ensure they are properly credited for the work they complete. This starts by defining work unit values specific to your practice.

If don't have these values already, consider one of these two options to get started:

- Create modality-specific default values
- Modify existing RVU values to better match your practice

After collecting data for several weeks, you can calculate work unit values per exam based on time-in-dictation statistics from your own practice.

Radiologists Feedback

Once a radiologist is presented with the perfect worklist and once they feel confident their work is fairly measured, you can deploy a productivity gauge to give radiologists immediate feedback on their contribution.

Radiology Support

It's important to have workflows in place for operations teams to support the radiologist. Radiologists need to know that they can request support and that nothing slips through the cracks. These responsibilities often fall to a radiology support team. To help the support team, they will need:

- Prioritized worklist showing the radiologists supports requests
- Worklists to monitor exams to ensure they are read by the right radiologist and meet turnaround targets
- Alerts and notifications when attention is needed for certain exams and practice conditions

Business Metrics

There is a variety of business metrics that are critical to your success. Leadership teams should have easy access to this data, including:

- SLA compliance reports
- Subspecialty reading rates
- Radiologist and shift-based productivity

Other reports might help identify areas of breakdown

- Out of order reading
- Radiologist time in dictation
- Radiologist auto-next reading rate

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About Intelerad

Intelerad is a global provider of medical imaging solutions that help streamline the flow of information while simplifying complex processes and maximizing efficiencies for medical professionals. Intelerad's robust imaging technology empowers confident decision-making, improves access to critical health information, and gets patients the answers they need faster.

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