

Radiology: Common Myths

Information for Medical Students Considering a Career in Radiology

MYTH: You will never see or talk to a patient ever again...

FACT: Radiologists see and talk to patients all the time.

Studying and evaluating x-ray images is certainly a large part of being a radiologist—and perhaps the most recognizable part of the job. But, in reality, radiology is a diverse field that is centered around medical imaging. Academic departments are typically divided into sections or subspecialty areas by body part or imaging modality, and each section performs a variety of diagnostic and therapeutic procedures.

In private groups, these divisions are less apparent, but most practicing radiologists have specific roles in their groups as well. In particular, fluoroscopy, interventional radiology, ultrasound, and mammography subspecialists are especially involved in direct patient care, including counseling patients, performing procedures, and post-procedure management.

If you value direct contact with patients, consider radiology.

MYTH: You will be alone in a dark room all day, every day...

FACT: Radiologists see the light of day.

While it is an undeniable truth that radiologists spend time in a dimly lit room, the radiology reading room is likely filled with people and activity throughout the day. Unlike many other medical specialties, attending physicians work with residents throughout the day, reviewing studies, answering questions, performing procedures, and teaching. Clinical teams routinely request consultations with radiologists either directly by visiting the reading room or indirectly through electronic communications. Plus, radiologists are prominent members of all tumor boards and most other multi-disciplinary meetings that revolve around medical imaging.

The importance of radiology in medical diagnosis becomes even more apparent in the emergency department as radiologists often become the nexus for patient triage and management during major disasters and tragedies.

For expertise that can be shared with others, consider radiology.

MYTH: The radiology job market is dismal, no one can get a job...

FACT: The radiology job market is steady and reliable.

Advancing technology continues to expand the field of radiology. In the 1990s, the technological advancements and diagnostic importance of CT and MRI created a boom in the use of radiology. That growth led to a rapid increase in the need for radiologists across the country, creating a highly desirable market for graduating residents and fellows. Although the market has stabilized since that period of growth, the current number of job openings remains equal to the number of graduating fellows, assuring a solid future for individuals entering the field of radiology.

For a medical profession offering a reliable future, consider radiology.

MYTH: Radiology is static and mundane...

FACT: The future of radiology is dynamic and innovative.

Radiology is among the most dynamic specialties in medicine with innovations and advancements occurring on a regular basis. Commercial CT scanners were first introduced in 1972, the first MRI scan was performed in 1977, and both modalities became common in clinical medical imaging in the 1980s and 1990s. Similarly, the first whole-body PET scanner was developed in 1977, and the first PET-CT scanner was introduced in 2000. Imaging utilization continues to increase as new applications and novel technologies in both diagnosis and treatment of diseases are continually being researched.

Few other medical specialties can claim such dramatic advancements over the past few decades. In fact, a textbook on radiology published in the 1990s would be considered outdated given today's technology.

For a career offering dynamic innovation and continued growth, consider radiology.

MYTH: Radiologists are a bunch of anti-social introverts who are afraid of talking to people...

FACT: Radiologists are social, extroverted, and love people.

Communication lies at the heart of radiology. To be successful, radiologists are in constant communication with patients, referring physicians, and other health care providers, as well as multidisciplinary teams. While radiology appears to the outsider as one person examining one image, the reality goes much deeper. The information gleaned by examining the image is shared with others, putting the radiologist in the role of subject matter expert. It's an ideal situation—the chance to focus on the science of radiology, and then turn around and share that knowledge with others.

For a career working alongside others, consider radiology.

Considering a career in radiology?

Learn more at membership@rsna.org, or contact your local radiology residency program director or chief residents.

