

The Radiology Staffing Market, Temporary and Permanent

Introduction: As pressures on reimbursement and utilization continue to have an impact on the imaging marketplace, radiology-staffing data suggest a shift in the availability and use of professional services over the past decade. This installment of the Imaging Market

File tracks current and recent developments in the supply of radiologists, the demand for their temporary (locum tenens) and permanent services, and related staffing trends, based on data collected by AMN Healthcare (San Diego, California) and Staff Care (Irving, Texas).

The active candidate pool in diagnostic radiology: While the physicians in the pool number 26,027, 88% of whom are board certified (Figure 1), almost 75% of those in the current pool are older than 45, and nearly 20% are older than 65 (Figure 2).

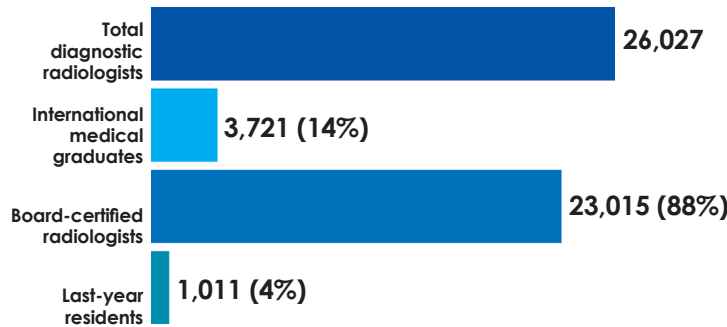


Figure 1. The total active-candidate pool available to organizations seeking diagnostic radiologists, based on numbers tracked by the AMA Physician Masterfile, is 26,027.

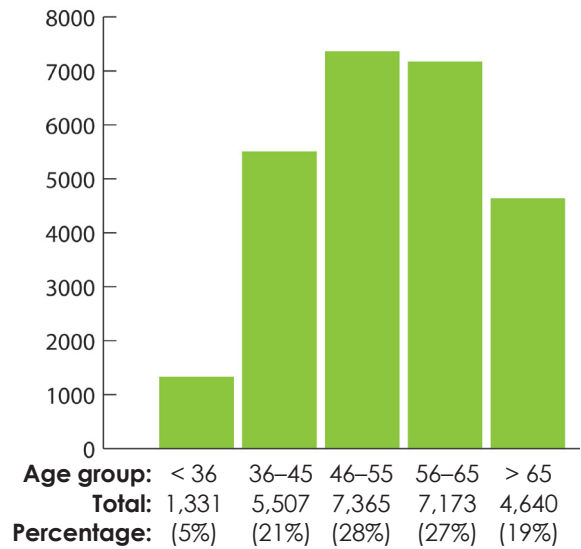


Figure 2. Active radiologists include only diagnostic radiologists active in patient care; almost half (46%) of radiologists are older than 55 and might be at or near retirement age.

The pipeline: The number of radiology residents in 2011 far exceeds the number in 1999, indicating that medical-school graduates continue to be attracted to the specialty (in contrast with areas such as primary care, where the number of US medical graduates has generally declined). The number of medical-school graduates selecting radiology residency programs decreased in the late 1990s (Figure 3), when it was widely predicted that managed care would decrease utilization of radiology services—and, by extension, would reduce practice opportunities and income for radiologists.

Ongoing radiology reimbursement cuts and the introduction of new delivery models (such as accountable care) could similarly reduce the number of medical-school graduates selecting radiology in the future. It should be noted, however, that the 2001 requirement of a fifth-year clinical rotation in radiology has not reduced the overall number of radiology residents and that the specialty remains attractive.

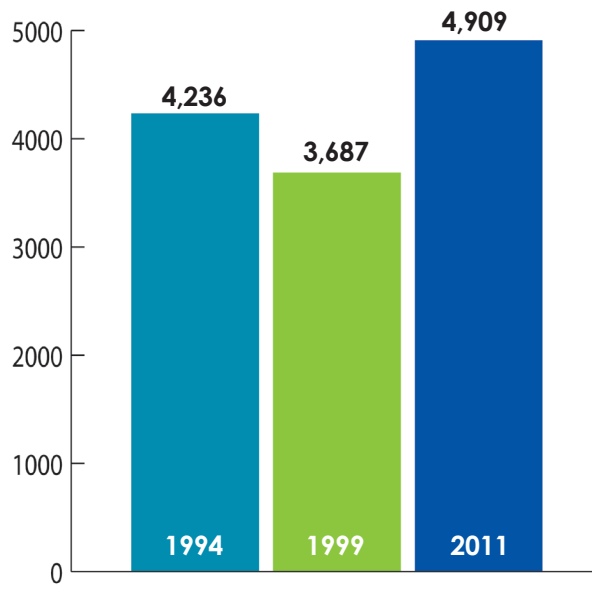


Figure 3. The number of radiology residents has fluctuated over the years.

Demand: Recent demand for diagnostic radiologists is reflected in the number of radiology searches conducted by national physician-search company Merritt Hawkins (Irving, Texas), particularly when viewed as a percentage of total physician searches conducted in the same years (Figure 4). Merritt Hawkins reports that in the years 2000, 2001, and 2002, diagnostic radiology was the most requested physician search. In 2010, in contrast, radiology was the 17th most requested search.

Merritt Hawkins attributes the decline in demand for radiologists to the economic downturn, which has decreased the use of elective and other procedures; to the continuing reduction in reimbursement for radiology services; and to a robust supply of newly trained residents entering the field. Though demand for radiologists has slackened in recent years, starting salaries have generally held steady (Table 1). The most recent (2010) salary numbers from Merritt Hawkins for radiologists, however, suggest that salaries might be on a downward trend.

General physician demand: While the current supply of radiologists appears to be adequate for demand, the growth in the use of temporary physicians is evidence of the ongoing physician shortage, which has obliged hospitals, medical groups, and other facilities to use locum tenentes to maintain services and revenue while seeking physicians to fill permanent positions. Numbers from Staff Care¹ (Figures 5 and 6) suggest that the use of locum tenens physicians remains common in health-care facilities. Table 2 compares costs per day for permanent and temporary radiologists.

References

1. Staff Care. 2011 survey of temporary physician staffing trends based on 2010 data. http://www.staffcare.com/pdf/2011_survey_of_temporary_physician_staffing_trends.pdf. Published 2011. Accessed November 10, 2011.
2. Medical Group Management Association. Highlights of MGMA's 2011 physician compensation survey. <http://blog.mgma.com/blog/bid/67161/Highlights-of-MGMAs-2011-Physician-Compensation-survey>. Published July 19, 2011. Accessed November 10, 2011.

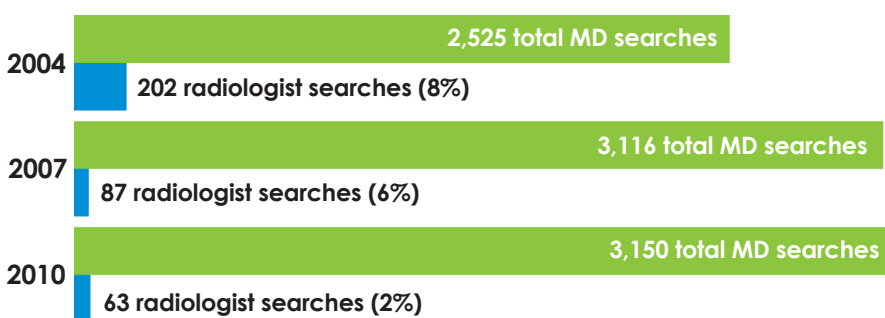


Figure 4. The number of diagnostic-radiologist searches, by year, as a percentage of total physician searches conducted by Merritt Hawkins.

Table 1. Starting Salaries for Radiologists, According to Merritt Hawkins

YEAR	LOW	AVERAGE	HIGH
2010	\$225,000	\$402,000	\$450,000
2009	\$225,000	\$417,000	\$650,000
2008	\$300,000	\$391,000	\$500,000
2007	\$230,000	\$401,000	\$750,000
2006	\$250,000	\$380,000	\$500,000

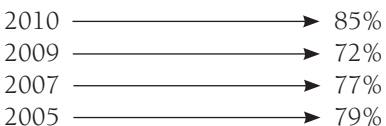


Figure 5. Percentage of health-care facilities surveyed that had used locum tenens physicians in the previous 12 months.

Summary: Though the numbers cited above indicate that demand for radiologists has declined in recent years, long-term trends point to a gradual (but steady) revival in demand for radiology services. Radiology is an aging specialty, and it can be anticipated that the supply of radiologists will be significantly reduced in the next five to 10 years due to retirement and attrition.

Supply might be further constrained, should medical graduates be dissuaded from selecting the specialty due to reimbursement cuts. Demand, by contrast, will be driven upward by an aging population, as it has been demonstrated that imaging use greatly increases after age 65.

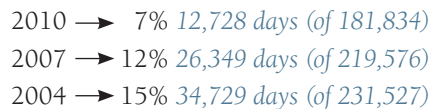


Figure 6. Radiologists' temporary staffing assignments (as a percentage of total staffing assignments).¹

Table 2. Cost of Permanent and Temporary Diagnostic Radiologists

PERMANENT STAFF	
Median income ²	\$463,226
Benefits	\$73,342
Malpractice coverage	\$19,300
Daily cost (250 days/year)	\$2,224
LOCUM TENENS (INCLUDING TRAVEL, HOUSING, AND MALPRACTICE COVERAGE) ¹	
Daily cost	\$2,150

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