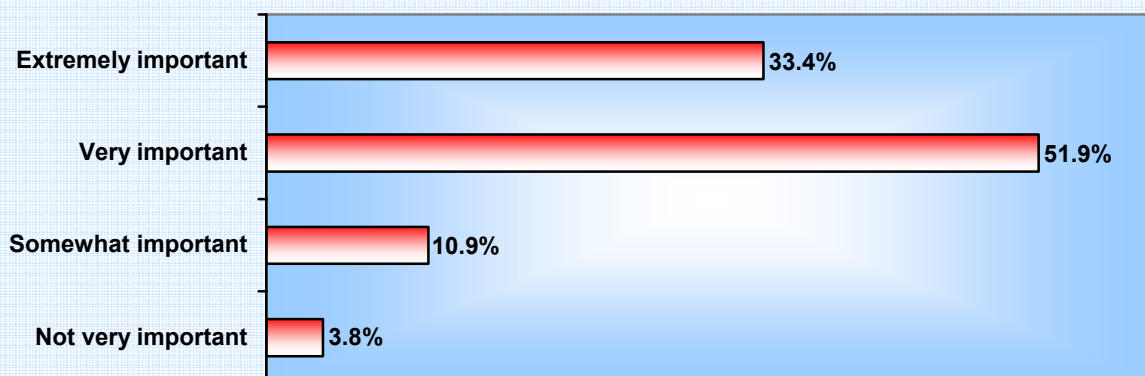


## Helping Radiology Patients Relax

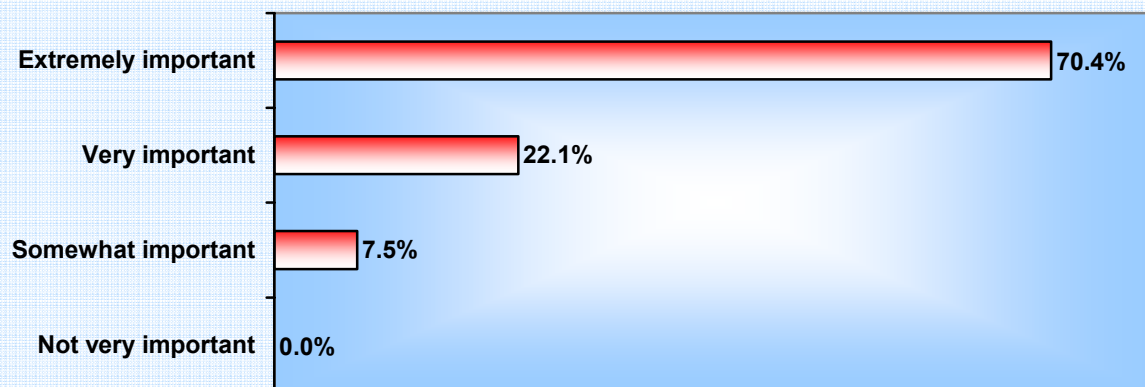
The future of radiology departments is not only new equipment and the advancement in filmless technology; it is focused on becoming more patient-care oriented. **RadSciences Group** recently conducted a survey to gather opinions of technologists regarding the importance of and strategies for providing better patient care.

The following survey was conducted by **RadSciences Group** in the month of March 2005, and all respondents were contacted at random. This group of respondents is composed of Radiologic Technologists (25.9%), Computed Tomography Technologists (17.4%), Magnetic Resonance Imaging Technologists (22.3%), Nuclear Medicine Technologists (19.6%), and Ultrasound Sonographers (14.8%).

### 1. Taking every aspect of your profession into consideration, how important is being able to spend quality time with your patients?

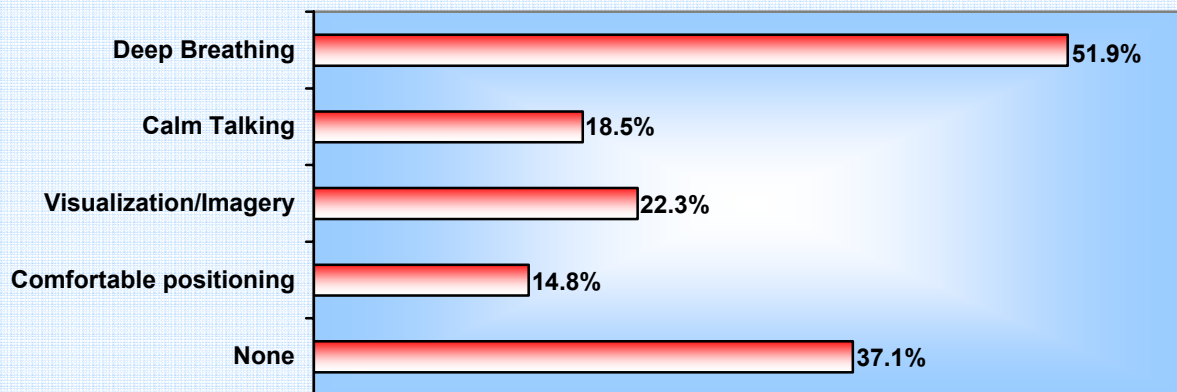


### 2. How important is being able to effectively help patients relax while in your care?



Spending quality time with patients is important to most technologists; however, many feel they just do not have the time to actually accomplish this objective because of increased workload, patient access limitations and limited radiology personnel. By not spending quality time talking with patients and making them feel comfortable, patients may become anxious and distressed. Nearly three quarters of those surveyed felt it is extremely important to help patients feel relaxed. Relaxation can lower the pulse, lower blood pressure, decrease muscle tension, reduce pain and can assist in a feeling of well-being or control. It may not always be possible to provide the most ideal environment for relaxation, but providing a bed, reclining surface, individual attention or privacy can help.

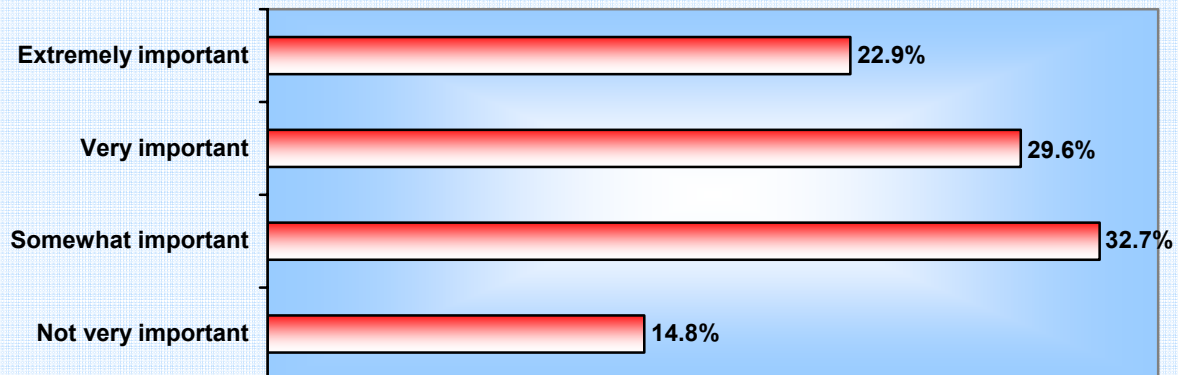
### 3. What relaxation techniques/methods have you used to help your patients relax? (multiple responses possible)



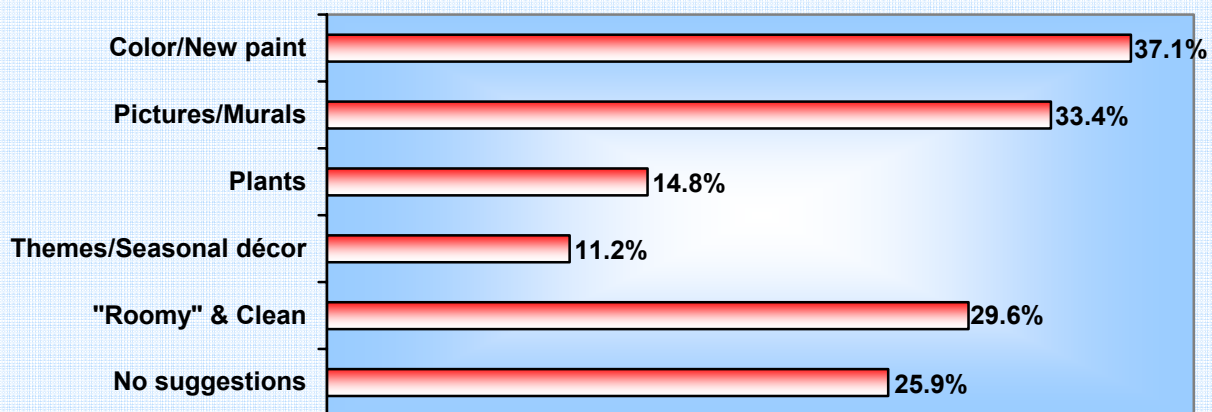
Over one-third of the respondents stated they had never used relaxation techniques with their patients. This is most likely due to the fact that they have never been taught appropriate relaxation methods or simply do not realize that methods such as asking the patient to take deep breaths, giving the patient a pillow for comfort and talking calmly with the patient can all be used as relaxation techniques. The following are simple relaxation techniques that can be used in a radiology department:

- **Muscle Relaxation.** This method consists of a series of tensing and relaxing exercises to help the patient realize the difference between the two. For example, the patient can begin by tensing and relaxing the hands and then practicing this method from head to toe. (Painful areas should be avoided)
- **Imagery/Visualization.** Ask the patient to imagine or visualize a relaxing scene. An image can be suggested or allow the patient to develop their own. This can be more difficult because some people are not able to execute this method.
- **Meditation.** A mantra, or “neutral sound without specific meaning, which is repeated silently over and over again” is used as a focal point to help patients relax. Alternatives for a mantra can be a lit candle in a dark room, a pleasant smell, or a picture.
- **Deep Breathing.** Ask the patient to focus on their breathing or take deep breaths. This method cannot always be used if patients have breathing problems as with advanced cancer patients.
- **Music Therapy.** Have a wide variety of music available for self-selection. The music should be non-lyrical with a slow rhythm. It is best to provide headphones to help patient feel privacy and be able to control the volume.

**4. How important is the décor/decorations/furnishings of a radiology department in relation to helping patients relax and providing better patient care?**



**5. In regards to anything you have seen, heard of, read about, or from your own suggestions, in what ways could the décor/decorations/furnishings of the radiology department be improved? (multiple responses possible)**



According to our survey, there was a fairly even distribution of responses for whether the décor of a radiology department helps patients relax or helps provide better patient care; however almost 75 percent of the respondents had suggestions on how it could be improved. The majority felt color, new paint or wallpaper, pictures and/or murals could help improve a radiology department.

A little more than 80 percent of MRI, CT and Nuclear Medicine Technologists felt that the décor of the department is extremely important to helping patients relax. These techs felt that pictures and focal points are beneficial to their patients because they have to deal with claustrophobic patients, very ill patients, long scan times and/or children.

Many respondents felt that the extent of their working environment is four plain walls with no windows. The respondents felt that the department should not be too decorative but made suggestions that the color should be “cheery”, “pleasing to the eye”, and “relaxing”. Several techs suggested plants and clean spaces to help patients feel relaxed and comfortable.

Most of us would agree that people do not want to be in a hospital. One respondent noted that he works in a hospital every day and probably feels the same way that his patients do: “Hospitals are cold and sterile. They are not very fun or inviting. A little improvement can go a long way, and I’m sure both the patients and techs would appreciate more color and pictures to look at each day.” The arrangement of a radiology department affects both the patients’ and the staffs’ attitude and perceptions.

According to the Chicagoland Chief Engineer Association, “color exerts its effects on humans on a subconscious level. Subtle colors evoke feelings of confidence, achievement and stability. Bright colors provoke an immediate response, but can become irritating over longer periods of time.” Different colors evoke different perceptions and feelings.

- **Red.** Represents warmth, power, excitement, aggression, elevates blood pressure and respiratory rate.
- **Yellow.** Alerts the brain, enhances concentration and creativity.
- **Blue.** Helps overcome hurt. Represents serenity, peace, joy, tranquility, faith in oneself and trust in others. Relaxes the nervous system, causes the body to produce calming chemicals.
- **Green.** Eases stress, the color of balance, color of healing and hope. Represents optimism and freedom
- **Orange.** Soothes anxiety, gives a sense of wellness and strength. Represents warmth, contentment and fruitfulness.
- **White.** Represents sterility, innocence and purity.
- **Purple.** Relaxes and soothes fears.
- **Brown.** Represents credibility and solidity.
- **Pink.** Makes people calm and soft hearted.

Having pictures and murals for patients to view was another popular response from the technologists surveyed. According to the Art Research Institute in Atlanta, healthcare facilities with nature scenes can help patients relax while receiving treatment.

- Nature imagery, when incorporated into treatment environments, can reduce patient stress and anxiety.
- A relaxed patient is more receptive, and consequently more responsive to treatment.
- Upgraded, user friendly environments are a positive marketing tool, instantly perceived by the public eye, and provide a strong facility competitive edge.
- Images are patient focal points. When viewed during treatment, patients are less likely to squirm or fidget, helping to avoid costly repeat treatment.
- Tranquil working environments contribute to increased staff satisfaction, and reduces employee turnover.
- Viewing nature imagery reduces systolic blood pressure and pulse; helps to redirect negative thought; sustains interest, while decreasing boredom; allows for a beneficial passage of time; and nature is an adjunct to the healing process.

A more involved approach to improving the décor of a radiology department is to incorporate themes or seasonal decorations in order to provide a more inviting atmosphere. One respondent believed this was an excellent concept, but that the department must be cautious of how they decorate in order to sustain a relaxing environment. While on a travel assignment, this technologist worked in a facility that had decorative fish hanging from the ceiling and found that it made the patients nauseous. While it was a fun and creative concept, it had an adverse effect on the ill patients.

The theme should match the requirements of the patients. For children, cartoon characters or a circus theme may be appropriate. One respondent said he worked in a children’s hospital that incorporated a “Jungle Book” theme, and the children were really responsive to that environment. A children’s hospital in Tennessee decorated the facility with the state trees and flowers, making it colorful and appealing to the patients.

A hospital just outside of Orlando, Florida created the “Seabreeze Imaging Center”. It is a replica of a beachside resort which includes seaside-inspired walkways, beach chairs, beach sandals and replacing standard paper gowns are surfer shorts. The department provides private cabanas as changing areas. A soundtrack of seagulls and waves play while patients are being scanned in the MRI and CT suites, and scents of suntan lotion and seaspray aromas fill the air. The most astonishing achievement is the alteration of the MRI and CT components to look like sand castles.

## **SUMMARY**

Dr. Curtis Langlotz, an assistant professor of radiology at the University of Pennsylvania, put it best when he said, “The future radiology department is focused on the patient, not technology.” While technology is important to both the technologist and the patient, providing better patient care should be a priority in radiology departments. The patient may not realize that the new, advanced equipment is providing better results that can help make a quicker diagnosis, but they do immediately perceive their surroundings and the manner in which they are being treated.

Helping patients relax with methods such as deep breathing and imagery exercises, displaying calming colors, exhibiting pictures or murals with scenic views, and/or providing a pleasant smell or audio can result in patients being more responsive to treatments, patients having a feeling of well-being and can help decrease scan times. Creating enjoyable looking spaces to work in also helps the staff feel more comfortable, and it encourages a healthier work environment.

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