

Initial Experiences of a Parents Support Group at a Large Academic Medical Center

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OBJECTIVES

At our large academic institution, the authors perceived a need for increased support for parents, particularly in the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that the prime years to start a family often overlap with years in training and early career, many radiologists find it difficult to navigate the balance of career and personal life. Studies have shown that the psychological stress from the pandemic is highest among younger and female respondents as well as those with pandemic specific childcare needs. The first objective of this project was to assess the areas of greatest need for parents in the radiology department at a single large academic medical center, including both trainees and staff. Second, we sought to organize and improve upon existing resources as well as advocate for novel approaches to support.

METHODS

A Parents Support Group was created to organize, publicize, and expand upon the resources available to new and expecting parents within the radiology community of a single large academic medical center. The goal of this initiative is to help parents navigate the complexities of balancing family demands with work life - addressing both practical challenges such as childcare and lactation resources as well as emotional stressors such as sleep deprivation and feelings of isolation that can come with early parenthood.

The group was started in the fall of 2021. Financial support was provided through an institutional wellness grant.

We conducted an initial needs assessment survey to better understand current perceptions, stressors and unmet needs of expecting and new parents within the department of radiology. Our 47-question needs assessment survey was sent to the entire department of radiology including trainees (n=244) though targeted to individuals who are family planning or in the early stages of navigating parenthood. 58 individuals (19 females, 25 males; 21 staff, 22 trainees) responded to the survey. The survey assessed demographics of respondents (trainee vs staff, stage of training or career, parental status), perceptions regarding institutional and departmental support for new parents, and current stressors relating to parenting (focusing on lactation and childcare).

Subsequently, a steering committee of trainees and attendings, both male and female, was created to address survey results.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY RESULTS

CURRENT PERCEPTIONS

- **Unanimous agreement that institution and radiology department should support people pregnant individuals and their partners as well as people with children**
- Majority agreed that radiology department supports pregnant individuals and partners (81%) and people with children (64%)
- ~50% of pregnant individuals & their partners felt current or recent pregnancy had negative impact on training/career
- Just over half of respondents felt that **radiology department does not provide sufficient resources for pregnant individuals and their partners (54%) or people with children (64%)**

FAMILY PLANNING

- **76% of trainees and 57% of staff (67% overall) have altered family planning due to training or career concerns**
- Main reasons cited: **work hours** and **focus on training/career**
 - Also childcare concerns, upcoming exam, anticipated burden on peers & financial constraints
 - Insufficient parental leave and radiation exposure selected least frequently

PUMPING

- 11 respondents reported pumping at work currently or in past
- **Majority (9 of 11) reported moderate to a lot of stress with pumping**
- Main stressors selected: **difficulty stepping away from clinical duties** and **length of time away from clinical duties**
 - Also lactation space too far away

CHILDCARE

- Current childcare arrangement: majority reported spouse/partner
 - Also nanny/babysitter, daycare, school, and other family support (in that order)
- **Majority (77%) reported moderate to a lot of stress in arranging childcare**
- Main stressors selected: **cost of care** and **back up care options**
 - Next: balancing care for multiple children or multiple childcare resources (eg, nanny & daycare)

WELLNESS INTERVENTIONS

- Question: What would most benefit your wellness as a parent?
- Majority chose **central document detailing resources**
- Next most popular choices: group events (with and without children) > improved lactation facilities > panel discussions/guest speakers > supplemental funding for lactation supplies > infertility awareness/support
- Comments: many comments asking for more flexible/predictable work hours and/or at home work; on site childcare

SELECT COMMENTS

"The most helpful resources, especially for trainees would be to have on-site childcare as well as subsidized childcare. Many trainees have delayed starting a family because of the cost of childcare."

"Fully equipped PACS workstation available to trainees would be a huge improvement for [those] pumping."

"Pumping at this time would be near impossible I think. I rarely have time to eat lunch or take a phone call, there is just not enough flex time in a day to stack in anything else."

"As a male partner to a woman radiologist, I feel excluded from groups for mothers and women... and the information I get from them would help our family."

"One extremely helpful situation for me that came up with COVID was the hybrid model of working as a radiologist. I am able to spend more time with my kids at home since I don't have to drive to work and am really available as soon as the shift ends."

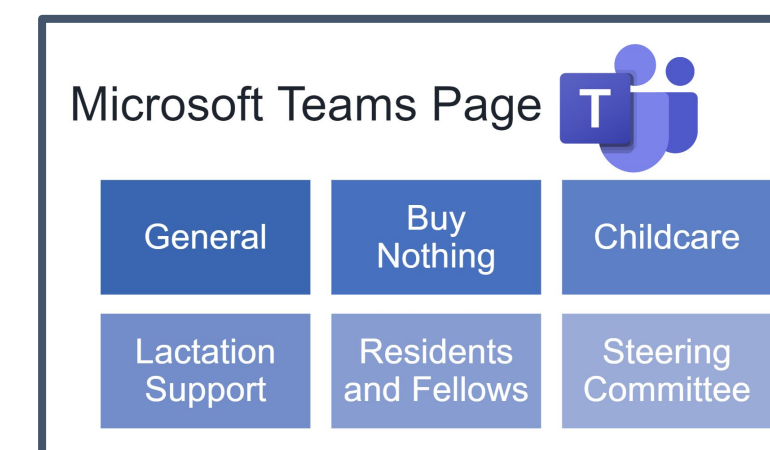
"Improving the overall culture and atmosphere where people can feel safe and supported to bring up difficulties and conflicts that they face with childcare."

INITIAL INTERVENTIONS

Several interventions have been organized by the steering committee, as described in greater detail below.

CENTRAL RESOURCE

Creation of a centralized online resource for expecting and new parents through the departmental communication platform (Microsoft Teams), a platform already in widespread use throughout the department.

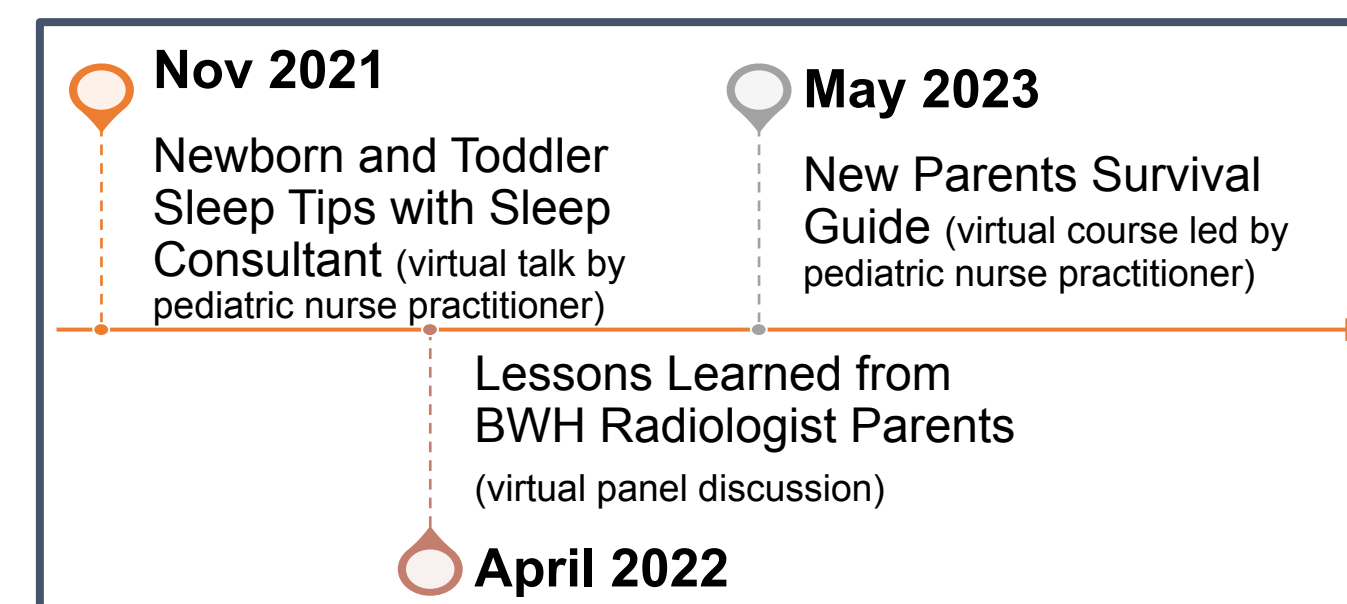


Page channels:

- **General:** Open forum for group messaging
- **Buy Nothing:** Interactive marketplace where parents can donate and receive toys, clothes, gear, etc
- **Childcare:** Details existing institutional childcare resources, including a nanny listserve, daycare spreadsheet (details nearby centers with hours of operation, cost, etc), and backup care options
- **Lactation Support:** Details existing institutional lactation resources, including how to access on site lactation facilities. Further, includes a form to request a free wearable breast pump (also see Lactation Support below)
- **Residents and Fellows:** Document created by trainees for trainees on navigating pregnancy and postpartum
- **Steering Committee:** Page for steering committee communication

VIRTUAL EVENTS

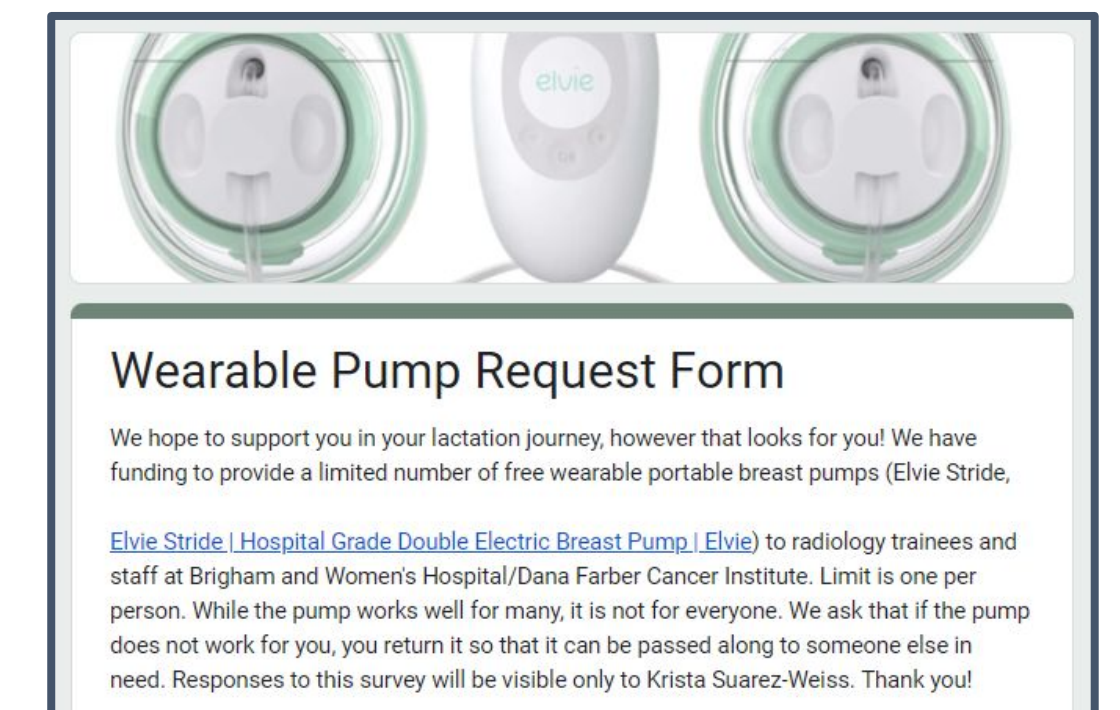
To date, we have organized three virtual events, as follows:



INTERVENTIONS (CONT.)

LACTATION SUPPORT

Purchased ten wearable breast pumps to be provided for free to trainees and attendings in need. Purchased privacy room dividers for use in reading rooms for those who wish to pump at their workstation. See also "Central Resource: Lactation Support."



CONCLUSIONS

There is a need for improved support among parents in the department of radiology at our large academic medical center. Improved support through centralized reference point outlining resources, free lactation equipment, group events and other interventions may address this need.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future directions may include in person group events, childcare support such as stipends or on site care, improved lactation facilities, infertility awareness and support, and a mentorship program.

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