

## Profession leader advocates for sonographers

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by CAROLE PEARSON



**'ve had an amazing career,"** says Cathy Fix, an ultrasound supervisor for Providence Health in Vancouver. -I've been doing ultrasound for 25 years. I've done sales, clinical applications, and some marketing. I've done traveling with it. I've been to places like Bangkok, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the States. For me, it's been an amazing journey. I love what I do."

If she looks familiar, it could be because, a few years ago, her photograph appeared on city buses as part of an HSA ad campaign. -It was hilarious," she exclaims. -My family burst out laughing. I said to them, "I'm going to be like Carrie Bradshaw from *Sex in the City* and my face is going to be on the side of a bus!"

Fix works at St Pauls Hospital and is a clinical instructor in the radiology department at the University of British Columbia. -It's one of the things I'm very proud of," she says. -This is something that usually only physicians are awarded. There's just three other technologists, that I'm aware of, who are clinical instructors at the university." Fix was nominated and elected to this position. -I'm really proud of this because it was a lot of hard work."

Fix has also taught at the British Columbia Institute of Technology, where she received much of her professional training. After high school, she began training as an x-ray technologist at BCIT and completed her studies at Vancouver General Hospital where she had the opportunity to get a little ultrasound training. -It was just starting up in the 70s in Vancouver and I thought the technical part of things looked sort of cool."

Working at UBC as vacation and sick relief, she performed more ultrasounds. -I realized that there's more to this than I thought. I ended up back at BCIT and did my ultrasound training there."

Fix says the best part of her job is working with patients. -I really like the technology because I like computers. I'm sort of "geeky" that way. But ultimately, I like being in the room with the patients. There's the job satisfaction of having a patient explain some of their health problems and you're able to put those pieces together and sometimes give an answer to their physician."

Cathy Fix Ultrasound Supervisor Providence Health Care
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The current shortage of sonographers is not just a national problem, but worldwide, she says. It is especially noticeable in Canada, Fix explains, because sonographers do most of the scanning and ultrasounds have

become a common diagnostic procedure.

-I think the public demand for ultrasound is much more than it was 15 or 16 years ago," says Fix. -For example, its now considered the standard of care that every pregnant woman receives an 18-week scan. When I started in ultrasound, that certainly wasnt the case."

Unlike some hospitals, Fix says her departments at St. Pauls and St. Josephs are -well-staffed." Because of the large proportion of women working in health care, she tries to "overhire for positions in order to accommodate those people with families who want holidays in the summer or shifts that are compatible with school hours.

-A lot of young women who go into this field are going to have babies," she explains. -They want to be able to have the flexibility of a good job with the vacation time they worked for. They also want to have time for their families." Flexibility is especially important for younger workers, she says, because their generations insist on a balance between work and family life.

-I think a lot of HR departments are finally realizing that this is really important so more part time positions are opening up," she says. -Sure, it costs more money but in the long run, youre go-ing to have a better department to work in." People will be happier and the level of injuries could be reduced with people working fewer hours.

Fix says, -Eighty per cent of sonographers scan with some sort of pain. Out of those, 20 per cent will have career-ending injuries. For someone who really enjoys what they do, it can be a pretty devastating situation."

Lengthier, more difficult procedures are raising injury rates. -Between 20 and 50 per cent of our case load involves technically difficult patients," she says. Higher obesity rates, limited acoustical access and fatty liver disease are causing increased numbers of failed ultrasound exams. This also makes the job more physically demanding and raises the risk of injuries on the job.

Greater mobility within imaging departments could help reduce the risk of repetitive strain injuries. Fix suggests, -We should work together as technologists and if a CT tech wants to do some ultrasound, train them. If an ultrasound tech wants to do an MRI, train them. Allow for that rotation so youre not injuring those joints."

Fix says sonographers can also do their part to prevent injuries. This includes taking scheduled breaks (-I feel very strongly about that!), doing stretching exercises and getting treatments like massage therapy. -We have great benefits," she says, referring to the collective agreements negotiated by HSA for its members. -Take advantage of those benefits so youre not getting yourself into a situation where you are becoming injured."

Earlier this year, Fix was invited to speak to delegates at the Canadian Diagnostic Medical Sonographers conference in victoria about research at St. Pauls on three-dimensional imaging of the endometrium. In the past, she has served in executive positions with her professional organizations, but these days Fix prefers lecturing and working with students.

-I feel very strongly about supporting the associations I belong to," she says, -so I do a lot of speaking. Its something I enjoy and Im proud of what I do for a living." 

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