

ASNR Young Professionals Spotlight: Dr. Jonathan Burdette

Interview conducted by Dr. Bhavana Budigi

1. You've built an impressive career in academic neuroradiology while staying connected to your creative passions in the arts. How have you achieved optimal work-life balance? What advice would you give to early-career professionals trying to do the same?

Work-life balance is one of those phrases that's discussed constantly, especially with the younger generations. Work is part of life — not separate from it. For me, the goal isn't to *balance* the two but to live fully within both.

I've always believed that if you're truly enjoying what you do, it doesn't feel like work. Radiology challenges me intellectually, and music and the arts feed me creatively. I've sung in the local opera company, served on the symphony board, and stayed deeply connected to the arts community. Those activities don't compete with radiology — they complement it.

The key is to have something outside of medicine that you care about just as much. Go *all in* with your passions because immersing yourself in them refreshes your mind for work. When I'm all in at the hospital and all in on stage, both feel more meaningful. Instead of constantly worrying about "balance," I focus on being fully present in whatever I'm doing.

2. You've successfully woven together fields like music, art, and neuroscience into your research. Why do you think it's valuable to bring different interests into medicine and research? How can young clinicians intentionally build careers that reflect their passions?

Early in my career, one of my mentors told me to write grants on topics I cared about. That advice stayed with me. I've always loved the arts, so even while doing core neuroradiology research, I kept thinking about how to connect neuroscience and music. Eventually, I built projects studying how different types of music engage brain networks, and that curiosity led me to collaborations and lectures around the world.

The lesson? Don't wait for permission to pursue something unconventional. If you have a genuine passion — whether it's art, travel, or technology — find creative ways to tie it into your scientific or clinical work. It may not follow a traditional path, but that's often where the most interesting research happens.

You may hear “no” a few times, but don’t let that stop you. If others aren’t doing it, that’s not a deterrent — it’s an opportunity. Radiology gives us incredible access to data, imaging, and the human body. Use that vantage point to ask new questions. Your curiosity can lead you to places you never expected.

3. Artificial intelligence is transforming the field of radiology. Despite ongoing debates—ranging from optimism to concern—there has been a notable increase in diagnostic radiology residency applications alongside persistent workforce gaps. As an expert deeply engaged with imaging and data, how do you foresee AI shaping the future of radiology, particularly for those at the start of their careers?

AI is on everyone’s mind right now — and for good reason. It’s already changing the way we practice, but probably not in the way people feared years ago.

When AI first came into focus, some predicted that it would replace radiologists entirely. That hasn’t happened yet. What’s more realistic is that radiologists who learn to use AI effectively will replace those who don’t. These systems are powerful tools for improving efficiency and accuracy. They can help streamline workflows, enhance image reconstruction, and even assist with drafting reports.

That said, radiology will always need human judgment. Machines are trained on human data, and human oversight remains essential. Patients, clinicians, and even lawyers aren’t ready to accept an algorithm as the final word — and frankly, neither am I.

So, AI won’t eliminate radiologists in my opinion; it will elevate the field. It’s making us faster, more precise, and better equipped to handle growing imaging volumes. The smartest thing young radiologists can do is embrace it — learn how it works, think critically about how to apply it, and use it to enhance patient care rather than fear it.

4. You've mentored many students and trainees throughout your career. What do you think makes for a strong mentor-mentee relationship? What should young professionals look for in a mentor—and how can they be good mentees themselves?

The foundation of mentorship is genuine care. A good mentor truly wants to see their mentee succeed, not just in their career but in life. It’s not about formal titles or structured programs — it’s about connection, trust, and shared enthusiasm.

The best mentoring relationships are built on honesty and shared interests. A mentee should feel comfortable asking tough questions and confident that their mentor will give candid feedback.

On the flip side, mentees should bring energy, initiative, and curiosity. When someone shows up with enthusiasm and ideas, that's what gets a mentor invested.

Many of my mentors never even knew they were my mentors. I learned from watching how they handled themselves, how they interacted with others, and how they navigated challenges. Likewise, some of my mentees probably don't realize I think of them that way — I just care about their success and keep up with where they go.

And beyond formal mentorship, look around — there are mentors everywhere. You can model yourself after people you respect and adopt qualities that inspire you. In medicine, that kind of observation and reflection can be just as formative as direct guidance.

5. More radiologists are exploring roles outside of clinical practice—like working in AI, startups, or industry. What advice do you have for radiologists who want to explore these non-traditional paths? What skills or experiences should they focus on to prepare?

Radiology is a uniquely flexible specialty. Our expertise is essential not only in hospitals but also in research organizations, technology companies, and policy discussions. Many radiologists are now working with AI startups, imaging equipment manufacturers, and pharmaceutical trial groups — and that's a good thing.

To step into those spaces, first master your craft. Be an excellent radiologist. A deep understanding of imaging and clinical workflow is your strongest foundation. From there, seek out opportunities that broaden your skill set — leadership roles, committee work, collaborations with engineers or data scientists. Each new perspective adds value.

Medicine often trains us to focus narrowly, but we should be at the table when decisions about technology, equity, and public policy are being made. To do that, we sometimes need to learn the language of business, leadership, or data science.

My advice to young professionals: say YES! Say yes to new experiences, show up with enthusiasm, and be open to learning from people outside your field. That's how you'll discover unexpected directions for your career — and keep it interesting for decades to come.