

Bonnie Rush: Author, Lecturer, Expert Witness

BY SANDRA GURVIS, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Mammographer educates other mammographers. Better care for patients is the end result.

SOME PEOPLE find their purpose in life a little later than sooner; such was the case with star mammographer Bonnie Rush, A.S., R.T.(R)(M)(QM). As president of Breast Imaging Specialists, a San Diego-based educational, consulting and outreach resource, Bonnie travels far and wide, compressing (so to speak) legal and technical issues so mammographers and other interested parties can more easily understand what has become a highly complex and rapidly changing field.

Along with lecturing on successful communication techniques, she's also the author of *MQSA Made Easy*, now in its 22nd edition, a resource manual explaining the Food and Drug Administration's Mammography Quality Standards Act. In addition, she serves as an expert witness and provides inspections, accreditations and certifications.

Prior to becoming an R.T., Bonnie held several jobs. "If it hadn't been for my mother, I might have ended up doing something entirely different," she recalled. "My mother pointed out that I was technically inclined and self-directed, along with being a natural at caregiving."

Bonnie took her mom's advice and applied to the local three-year radiologic science program, although initially there was no room for her. "My lucky number is 33, and I was 33rd on the list of 30. Then three people dropped out and I was in!"

She received her associate degree in radiologic science at San Diego Mesa College and completed her internship at the local VA hospital in 1980, not surprisingly at age 33.

Although she started out working in a doctors' office, the early and untimely death of her sister-in-law of colon cancer provided Bonnie with the impetus to address women's issues. Mammography was a logical choice and she went on to attain certification in it as well as quality management.

An early mentor, Louise Miller, R.T.(R)(M)(MR), recognized her talent for teaching and invited her to collaborate on a mammography course at Mesa College. "Ms. Miller pointed out that even though I loved working with patients, I could make an even greater impact by educating mammographers through helping them provide better care."

Her professional path has kept her aware of the latest developments. "I held positions with a processor service and supply company, a film/equipment manufacturer and ultimately was hired to set up the first low-cost mammography screening service in San Diego," she stated. Toward the turn of the 21st century, when full-field digital mammography began to supplant standard film-screen radiographs, Bonnie was at the forefront, recognizing the need to help clients adapt to the transition.

Community outreach also has been a baseline of her career. In 1996, she founded the Mammography Society of San Diego and was involved with various radiologic technology and mammography organizations at the local, state and national level as well as the American Cancer Society.

Striking out on her own seemed as logical as, well, regular breast examinations. "I felt I had enough expertise to begin a serious push" as an educator and consultant, she

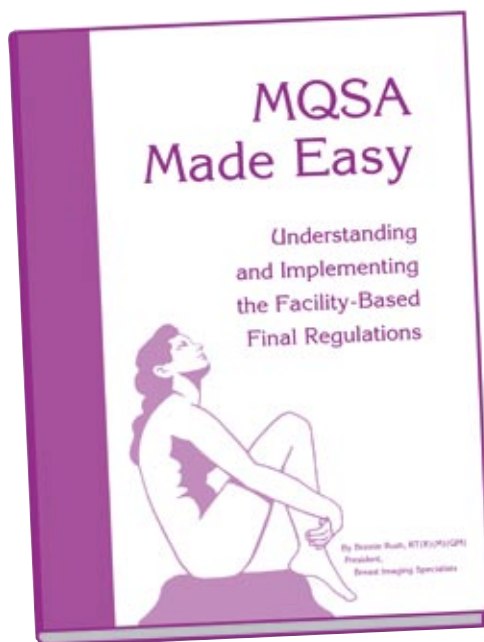




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Bonnie Rush lectured at Scripps Mercy Hospital in San Diego.

said. So she developed presentations on everything from imaging to positioning to process improvement to general mammography and more, “not just for mammographers, but also for office and nursing personnel.” In 1997 she formed Breast Imaging Specialists.

Initially she provided six-hour curricula for Academy Medical Systems, a company that sent her all over the United States to teach. It was then that she completed the book on mammography regulations. “There was a real need for a comprehensive, clearly defined guide that people could refer to whenever they needed it.”

In 2005 she was a finalist in *Health Imaging* magazine’s “Best of the Best” women’s imaging specialist contest and one of the top five Most Effective Radiologic Technologist Educators in the auntminnie.com “Minnie” award.

Her knowledge and skill also have drawn recognition in the courtroom where, as an expert witness, she works toward “defending breast imaging professionals and practices against unjustified malpractice suits.” In one case, her testimony proved that a ruptured implant was caused by encapsulation and injury rather than mammography. “It’s very distressing when a plaintiff feels they have suffered at the hands of a facility, so it’s vital to teach mammographers and other health care workers how to avoid these types of situations.”

But her first love remains the classroom, wherever it may be.

“The most thrilling part about education is when people’s faces light up with that ‘aha!’ moment,” she said. “I keep trying different ways of explaining until I see that everyone gets it, because then they walk away with a new skill.” ☺