

Medical Illustrator



Occupational Description

Medical illustration is art as applied to medicine, a fusion of science and the graphic image. Medical illustration is a descriptive term for the work of highly trained professional artists who choose medicine as their subject matter. It can be extremely realistic and anatomically precise or thematic and interpretive, or even abstract and wildly conceptual. Media used by medical illustrators can be high tech or traditional. Medical illustration is used effectively in all major markets, including advertising, editorial, institutional, and instructional. It is also at the forefront of newly emerging markets, such as legal, home health, and patient education or subjective impact. Medical illustration is a technically demanding and time-honored graphic art.



Job Description

Through the medical graphics they create, medical illustrators are communicators and teachers. Although some medical illustrators specialize in a single art medium or confine their interest to one of the medical specialties, the majority handle an ever-changing variety of assignments. They work with many different media to produce the highly accurate and authentic illustrations used in the publication of medical books, journals, films, videotapes, exhibits, posters, wall charts, and computer programs. Materials prepared by medical illustrators also may be used for projection in the classroom or for professional group presentations.

A medical illustrator also may work as a member of a research team to provide illustrations or to participate directly in the research problem. Some specialize in preparing prosthetics or in preparing models for instructional purposes.

In addition to the production of graphics and three-dimensional works, medical illustrators may serve as producers/directors or designers in the development of instructional programs. They also may organize and administer biomedical communication centers or illustration services at major teaching hospitals, health science centers, or elsewhere.



Employment Characteristics

Medical illustrators are employed by medical schools, dental schools, and schools of veterinary medicine. Large medical centers involved in teaching and research and animation studios involved in commercial and private multimedia productions also employ medical illustrators. Many medical illustrators work independently on a freelance basis for medical publishers, pharmaceutical houses, and advertising agencies, in commercial settings, or for lawyers. Medical illustrators with appropriate background and professional experience are qualified to direct an illustration service unit or a biomedical communication center.

Entry level salaries for graduates of medical illustration schools range from \$27,000 to \$35,000. Experienced medical illustrators earn an average of \$35,000 to \$70,000 per year, with the upper ranges of salary between \$90,000 and \$120,000.



Educational Programs

Length. Programs are generally 2 years, resulting in a master's degree.

Prerequisites. All current medical illustrator programs are at an advanced level and are based on a master's model. Generally, 4 years of undergraduate study are necessary to gain the required foundation. All programs culminating in a graduate degree require a baccalaureate degree and a good academic record. A preparatory program for the professional or graduate level of study should include a balance of art, premedical biology, and the humanities. Applicants for the advanced professional level programs must submit a portfolio of artwork.

Curriculum. Although the area of major emphasis may vary from school to school, programs of study usually include most of the following courses: human gross anatomy (with detailed dissection); histology; physiology; embryology; neuroanatomy; pathology; illustration techniques; anatomical illustration; surgical illustration; modeling; prosthetics; graphic design; exhibit design and construction; medical photography; television and multimedia production; computer graphics; business management; instructional design; and production technology.



Inquiries

Careers/Curriculum

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Program Accreditation

Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs
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