

Medical Illustrator

Medical illustrators specialize in the visual transformation, display, and communication of scientific information. Their graduate level training in biomedical science, art, design, visual technology, education, and communication enables them to understand and visualize scientific data and concepts to teach the general public and professionals in the fields of health care, research, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and demonstrative evidence. Medical illustrations appear in medical textbooks, medical advertisements, professional journals, instructional animations, computer-assisted learning programs, scientific exhibits, lecture presentations, general magazines, and courtroom presentations. Depending on the intended use, medical illustrations can be highly realistic and anatomically precise or they can be thematic, interpretive, abstract, or even wildly conceptual. Although medical illustration is commonly seen in print and electronic media, medical illustrators also work in three dimensions, creating anatomical teaching models, models for simulated medical procedures, and prosthetic parts for patients.



Career Description

Medical illustrators work closely with clients to interpret their needs and create visual solutions for them through effective problem solving. While some medical illustrators specialize in a single art medium or work primarily for one medical specialty, the majority handle an ever-changing variety of assignments from different clients, involving a variety of bio-medical content, and requiring a variety of media solutions. In addition to design and production roles, medical illustrators may function as consultants, art directors, supervisors, and administrators within the field of biocommunications.



Employment Characteristics

Many medical illustrators are employed in medical schools and large medical centers that have teaching and research programs. Other medical artists are employed by hospitals, clinics, dental schools, or schools of veterinary medicine. Some institutional medical illustrators work alone, whereas, others are part of large multimedia departments. Other medical illustrators choose to target specific markets such as medical publishers, pharmaceutical companies, advertising agencies, animation studios, physicians, or attorneys. Some work independently on a freelance basis; others set up small companies designed to provide illustration services to various targeted markets.

The employment outlook for medical illustrators is good. This is in part due to the relatively few medical illustrators who graduate each year, and in part due to the growth in medical research that continually reveals new treatments and technologies that require medical illustrations. A growing demand by patients to better understand their own bodies and medical options has expanded the need for medical illustration aimed at the lay public. In addition, increased need for medical illustrations and models to educate juries during courtroom presentations has expanded the medical-legal subspecialty of medical illustration.



Salary

Earnings vary significantly according to 1) the experience and ability of the artist, 2) the type of work, and 3) the area of the country where one works. The average starting salary in an institutional setting for a graduate of an accredited program of medical illustration is around \$45,000 a year plus fringe benefits. Experienced salaried illustrators usually earn about \$53,000 a year. Administrators and faculty members generally earn somewhat more. Salaried illustrators often supplement their income with freelance work. Refer to Section IV, Table 5 of this *Directory* for more information, or see www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Educational Programs

Length. Accredited programs generally last 2 full 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. Although admission requirements to accredited programs vary, a bachelor's degree with an emphasis on art and science is preferred. In addition, a portfolio of artwork and a personal interview are required.

Curriculum. While the area of emphasis may vary from program to program, the curriculum includes the following courses: an advanced course in human anatomy with dissection and courses in other biomedical sciences such as embryology, histology, neuroanatomy, cell biology, molecular biology, physiology, pathology, immunology, pharmacology, and genetics. Art and theory courses include anatomical drawing, illustration techniques in line, tone, and color (hand-rendered and computer-generated), surgical illustration, graphic design, computer graphics and multimedia, instructional design, motion media production, three-dimensional models and exhibits, management and business practices, and professional ethics.



Inquiries

Careers/Curriculum

Association of Medical Illustrators
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Program Accreditation

Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) in collaboration with:
Accreditation Review Committee for the Medical Illustrator
c/o CAAHEP
1361 Park Street
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