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Fact or fiction?

An advert promoting the services offered by *Naturejobs* has provoked a certain amount of criticism. The ad, which shows fictional postdoc Dr Ramirez 'searching' for a job while enjoying a massage, has prompted real postdoc Maria Sideris to write in. Ramirez seems all too relaxed, she says. More importantly, how can an out-of-work postdoc afford a massage? Postdocs nowadays have student loans to pay off. And even when they secure a fellowship, they often have to live on a stipend lower than the entry-level salaries for graduates.

Sideris, a postdoc at Ohio State University's department of molecular genetics in Columbus, goes on to make some valid points about the plight of young researchers — particularly women. Ramirez would surely be more stressed if she were a mother. Sideris writes, especially a mother without access to affordable childcare, which is a reality for researchers in many universities. Or maybe Ramirez is holding off from having children, as women researchers sometimes feel that becoming a mother can derail the tenure-track train.

In her letter, Sideris also questions the high-tech approach that the ad touts of letting web-based 'job agents' scour databases for suitable positions. Of course, the ad doesn't say job-seeking scientists should rely only on high-tech tools — old-fashioned methods such as networking, tracking research-funding trends, and contacting possible mentors and collaborators still apply.

Although the ad's storyline may be a little over the top, its exaggeration helps to put its point across. But it is important to distinguish between fact and fiction, moderation and hyperbole, even when they sometimes come together. As they do in Sideris' wish for her ad-world counterpart, which nicely echoes *Naturejobs*' wish for its readers: "I wish them all the best in their quest for professional stability and success."

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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