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In the picture

A few weeks ago, face-down on a treatment table, I experienced a biomedical-imaging epiphany. While anticipating a needle's entry into a gap between two cervical vertebrae — necessary to shoot a numbing agent, then an imaging agent, then a steroid into a strategic spot in my spinal column — a profound thought flashed into my mind: this is really going to hurt.

But after the treatment began, I realized how profoundly biomedical imaging can affect scientific careers. It could, in fact, lead to a demand for scientists even greater than the bioinformatics boom in the run-up to the completion of the human genome.

In both bioinformatics and bioimaging, there are two broad classes of scientific professionals, both very much in demand — people who can make stuff and people who can use it well. But bioimaging has the potential to provide more career opportunities, because in this field those two categories of people are both broad and complex (see page 252). In my situation, chemists created the bioimaging agent, physicists and engineers designed the imaging machine, and my physician combined imaging and treatment.

Plenty of opportunities exist, spanning many disciplines: medical physicists who can make imaging isotopes; molecular biologists who can use knowledge of receptors and ligands to target imaging agents, then treatment, to specific cell types; mathematicians who can write algorithms to combine imaging data from different sources ... the list of convergences goes on.

As a patient, I was very grateful for the convergence that made my treatment possible, as well as my physician's finesse in providing it. It didn't hurt. And neither would considering how biomedical imaging can affect your career — whether in terms of creating tools or using them for research.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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