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Cracking the combination

A solid understanding of basic research coupled with developed skills in clinical medicine is a highly desirable blend. Together, these qualities can help to turn cutting-edge science into real-world treatments. But such combined skill sets remain relatively rare. Despite an increase in the number of training programmes aimed at this career path, not enough scientists are choosing to move in this direction.

That was the message for attendees of this year's Days of Molecular Medicine symposium held in San Diego recently (K. Schwartz and J.-T. Vilquin *Nature Med.* **9**, 493–495; 2003). Many of the latest initiatives were discussed at the meeting, such as the multidisciplinary programmes set up by the University of California, San Diego, to train physician-scientists, pharmacist-scientists, PhDs who work in translational medicine, and physician-pharmacists.

Other programmes include Avenir, sponsored by France's biomedical research agency, INSERM. This supports training for clinicians involved in patient-based research, as well as institutional researchers, with renewable five-year contracts. Industry was also discussed — Genentech, Abbott Laboratories and Serono are among those that have joint training programmes with academia either in the works or under way.

Academia, industry and government seem to have recognized the need for hybrid skill sets, and the development of these programmes is a positive step in the right direction. The question remains about how to entice scientists to follow these paths — which are inevitably longer and more arduous than separate trails to basic research or clinical practice. Perhaps the market can provide some help in the shape of higher salaries and more job opportunities. But governments could also do their share — offering loan forgiveness as well as more long-term support.

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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