

This is one of a series of Fact Sheets on the photo imaging sector developed by industry experts to help people new to the sector understand the different job roles and the skills required in order to succeed. Fact Sheets are based on Job Profiles developed by Skillset. For the full list of *Job Profiles for the Audio Visual Industries*, visit www.skillset.org. We aim to keep this information as current as possible - a fully updated version will be available in the Winter of 2006. All Fact Sheets can be downloaded and printed from our website www.skillset.org/careers. To give us feedback, e-mail careers@skillset.org.

Medical photographers are normally based within the illustration departments of hospitals and medical schools, but may also be employed in research and health organisations, or by pharmaceutical manufacturers. In a large hospital they will work alongside a medical artist and a video technician. They record and produce objective images that may be used for measurement and reference, analysis or teaching purposes. They record the progress of operations, the effects of various diseases and medical conditions and record a patient's medical progress over a period of time. Images can be required for the illustration of forensic, medical or scientific reports, articles and research papers. A major function of the medical photographer is to assist in education and research. They can work in any department of a hospital. This includes photographing patients on the wards, in operating theatres during operations (where they will need to be scrubbed up and gowned) and in the post mortem room (although a dedicated pathological photographer may be used). In smaller hospitals the medical photographer is often required to be multi-skilled. They may have to use a video camera for video-conferencing and also do some graphic design work. Sometimes images are required for legal purposes such as solicitors' reports, or industrial accident and insurance claims within the courts. The medical photographer must adapt their skills as necessary. Some of their images may be sold to specialist photographic libraries.

The work

The medical photographer's work is very varied, and includes taking clinical photographs, digitising X rays, scanning conventional pictures, producing charts, graphs and slides for presentations, and may involve doing public relations work for the hospital. Photography is now largely a digital process but some pictures may still be required using standard 35mm cameras, and occasionally there is a need to undertake darkroom work. The job provides a technological challenge, as the medical photographer will be working at the forefront of new technology with specialist equipment such as photo-micrography (which allows microscopic objects to appear in full detail), thermal imaging (which reads the varying degrees of heat a person or an object emits) or endoscopy (for photographing internal organs). There are salaried, full-time posts in many hospitals, but there are also a number of freelance medical photographers. Once established, a medical photographer will find this is a slightly more secure area of work than many photographic occupations, although possibly less well paid.

Essential knowledge and skills

This is a job requiring very good interpersonal skills, as the medical photographer has to communicate with people at all levels. They will be taking pictures of patients in vulnerable states and must be able to gain their confidence and show sensitivity to their needs. IT skills in Photoshop, Premiere, and PowerPoint are called for, plus traditional photographic darkroom skills are useful (although most of the work is now digital). An understanding of medical terminology and anatomy is required, which usually comes with training and work-based experience. The medical photographer will have to be able to read a diagnosis on a patient's medical records (although they may use a medical dictionary). A combination of artistic and scientific ability is necessary.

A medical photographer needs:

- Good photographic and computer skills
- Excellent communication skills, plus tact and sensitivity in dealing with people
- Familiarity with medical terminology and protocols
- Adaptability to changing needs
- An awareness of the hierarchy and management structure within the hospital



England Helpline
08080 300 900

Scotland Helpline
0808 100 8094

www.skillset.org/careers

Typical career routes

Some initial experience working in any role in a hospital will be useful, just to get a feel for the environment, plus experience of working with the public. Having obtained formal qualifications in photography, a photographer may be taken on in a trainee role, which can combine on-the-job training and further specialist academic study. Even when a specialist degree is taken, a photographer may still have to "do time", and several years work and study may be required before a photographer is considered fully qualified. They will have to undertake continuous professional development throughout their careers in order to deal with ever-changing technology, and new medical information and procedures.

Training and qualifications

High-level formal qualifications are necessary. A three-year photography degree with art and design may be followed by post-graduate training. Latin is not required. There are also specialist courses, which are either full-time or part-time combined with work experience. The Institute of Medical Illustrators (IMI) and the British Institute of Professional Photographers (BIPP) recognise courses, which are listed on their websites.

Health and Safety

Health and safety are obviously important, both for the photographer and everyone they come in contact with. The medical photographer will have to follow the specific guidelines and directives drawn up by the individual hospital.

Photographers may be subject to physical stresses from carrying heavy camera equipment and lighting, indoors and out. They should therefore seek advice about appropriate techniques for lifting and moving equipment. In addition, photographers need to understand Health & Safety legislation, and should be capable of assessing and managing the risks and potential dangers associated with the use of electrical lighting, equipment and props. They should also ensure that they have a current Public Liability insurance policy to cover their working practices.

Where to go for more information

Skillset is the Sector Skills Council for the Audio Visual Industries. For information about training and professional qualifications, links to the Skillset network of training partners, and access to the comprehensive Skillset/BFI course database, visit the website www.skillset.org. **Skillset Careers** is the UK's only specialist media careers advice service delivering individual careers solutions when and how you need them. For detailed media careers information and advice, contact one of the free careers helplines. Call **08080 300 900** in England (also available to callers from Wales and Northern Ireland) or **0808 100 8094** in Scotland, or visit the website www.skillset.org/careers

Institute of Medical Illustrators (IMI)

Lists approved courses and also runs its own courses, including continuing professional development for experienced personnel. www.imi.org.uk

University of Cambridge School of Clinical Medicine – Medical Photography Dept.

This website gives a clear indication of the range of work undertaken by a medical photography department. www.medgraphics.cam.ac.uk

The British Institute of Professional Photography (BIPP) is a not for profit association of professional image makers that aims to improve standards, develop skills and encourage continuing professional development. The BIPP recognise over thirty colleges across the UK who have proved that they have the resources, facilities and expert lecturers necessary to run an effective professional photographic course. For details of BIPP Qualifications for practising professionals, visit the Membership pages on the BIPP website www.bipp.com. For a list of approved colleges, including those offering the PQE, e-mail mberry@bipp.com. Student membership is available to students attending a vocational course in photography at an educational establishment in the UK. The Institute's journal *The Photographer* is supplied free to all members. It has its own Medical Photography examinations. **T: 01920 464011**

The Association of Photographers (AOP) is a trade association of professional photographers, who campaign vigorously for photographers' rights and have had a key influence on the development of professional photography in the UK. Their publication *Beyond the Lens* is widely recognised as the definitive industry guide to copyright and licensing law, ethics and business practice. The AOP has a number of affiliated colleges and promotes, maintains and develops relationships between education and the professional industry. It also publishes *IMAGE* magazine, which reports on current trends in professional photography and image making. www.the-aop.org **T: 020 7739 6669**

The Royal Photographic Society (RPS) is the industry's 'learned body'. Established over 150 years ago, it aims to promote the art and science of Photography. It awards distinctions that are recognised throughout the world and has established specialist interest groups, and meetings for its members, who are drawn from both amateur and professional photographers. It publishes a monthly Journal. www.rps.org