

# Finding usable medical images made easier through software

August 20 2015, by Kim Smuga-Otto

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Medical education instructors often rely on images to communicate what they're teaching, whether it's the latest innovations in heart-valve replacement or the practicalities of surgery during humanitarian missions.

And though images can be found online pretty easily, determining the legality of using them is often considerably more challenging.

"If we have a two-hour online course, my guess is we spend 15 hours trying to figure out the copyright status of the presentations," said Linda Baer, director of continuing medical education at Stanford.

Now she—and anyone else looking for [medical images](#)—has a new resource to make that process easier: [Bio-Image Search](#), developed by Lane Medical Library, serves up images and diagrams exclusively from medical and scientific organizations. It groups the results based on the degree to which their re-publication is allowed.

A [search](#) for "breast cancer" returned 135 images with no restrictions beyond citing their source, as well as another 104 images with some restrictions, all clearly indicated.

Baer is delighted by the site's ease of use and clear copyright information.

She said that it will make her and course designers' jobs easier.

## Improving through wider use

While the search engine has access to over 2 million images, it has its limitations. It draws from only eight databases, and the majority of images come from PubMed Central. While PubMed articles are available for education purposes, the [images](#) within them might have different copyright restrictions that require contacting the publishers.

However, Tony Christopher, Lane's technology and customer support director who oversees the tool's development, feels the search will improve as more people use it. "Word is starting to spread," he said. Usage of the tool was up 60 percent in April compared to the previous months.

Bio-Image Search was originally called Lane Image Search when it launched in January. Its creator, web developer Alain Boussard, continues to upgrade the software and will be adding three more databases by the end of July.

It's not restricted to instructors; students writing papers, staff assembling presentations, or anyone visiting the website can access the tool. And as awareness grows, Christopher hopes Stanford researchers and departments will volunteer new image databases to integrate into the system.

But for Baer, even the current version is an improvement. "Having a resource where you can send someone makes everyone's lives simpler," she said.

**More information:** To contribute images to Bio-Image Search, contact Christopher at [tonychristopher@stanford.edu](mailto:tonychristopher@stanford.edu) or (650) 721-5993.

Provided by Stanford University Medical Center

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