Spotlight on AI and Healthcare: From Imaging to Immunity

Authors: Rohita Biswas, Cinthya Souza Simas, Sara Tóth Martínez, María Belén Moyano, Gerhard Steinmann, Roland Mertelsmann

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Affiliation: Journal of Science, Humanities and Arts (JOSHA), Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany

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Abstract:

This edition of the Spotlights brings together six curated reads mapping how computation and policy are reshaping medicine: from the pixel to the population. MetaSeg shows how meta-learned implicit neural representations can segment 2D/3D MRI with U-Net–level accuracy using ~90% fewer parameters, pointing to lighter models for routine 3D analysis. In parallel, AI protein-design pipelines promise rapid iteration, generating biomolecules with potential antimicrobial and anticancer applications while lowering barriers through tool sharing. At the immune interface, mRNA-encoded nanoparticle vaccination activates and matures HIV broadly neutralizing antibody precursors in humans, advancing germline-targeting vaccine strategy. Beyond the bench, the collection also probes the systems that determine whether innovation reaches patients—how corporatization reshapes care, how funding shocks can stall research momentum, and why prevention may hinge on clonal competition and inflammation control.

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Rohita Biswas, Cinthya Souza Simas, Sara Tóth Martínez, María Belén Moyano, Gerhard G. Steinmann, Roland Mertelsmann
editorial@josha-archive.org
Journal of Science, Humanities and Arts, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany

Abstract

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Keywords: Segmentation; Protein Design; Germline-targeting; Consolidation; Research Funding; Clonal Competition.

1. Breakthrough AI method redefines how doctors analyze medical images

By Rice University

MetaSeg has introduced a new approach to medical image segmentation that replaces U-Net–style models with meta-learned implicit neural representations (INRs), treating each 2D/3D scan as a continuous function over pixel/voxel coordinates while simultaneously learning to output anatomical labels. Because INRs are usually highly image-specific, the method uses meta-learning to "prime" model parameters so they can be rapidly optimized on a previously unseen scan at test time, enabling accurate decoding of anatomy from limited adaptation steps. In experiments on 2D and 3D brain MRI segmentation, the approach matched U-Net performance while using ~90% fewer parameters, pointing to a substantially more resource-efficient route for scalable segmentation in large and 3D medical datasets.

This article was previously published in *Rice News (Rice University)* on October 14, 2025.

Read the full article here

2. In seconds, AI builds proteins to battle cancer and antibiotic resistance

By Monash University

Australia has joined the global effort of using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to generate ready-to-use biological proteins that can kill antibiotic-resistant bacteria like *E. coli*. This article shares the latest advancements that the AI Protein Design Program—with nodes at the University of Melbourne's Bio21 Institute and the Monash Biomedicine Discovery Institute—has developed on this biomedical frontier. Beyond creating these proteins, they are taking it a step further by making these AI-driven design tools freely available to scientists everywhere. They emphasize the importance of democratizing technology so the whole world can leverage these tools for affordable drug development and diagnostics, potentially transforming biomedical research and patient care. This program, composed of talented structural biologists and computer scientists, is paving the way for using AI to

speed up treatments for pharmaceutical purposes, vaccines, nanomaterials, and tiny sensors, ensuring knowledge is shared with researchers around the globe.

This article was previously published in *Science Daily* on July 11, 2025.

Read the full article here

3. Vaccination with mRNA-encoded nanoparticles drives early maturation of HIV bnAb precursors in humans

By Jordan R. Willis *et al.*

A recent clinical study demonstrates that vaccination with mRNA-encoded nanoparticles can activate and promote early maturation of broadly neutralizing antibody (bnAb) precursors against HIV in humans. Through two clinical trials, IAVI G002 in the United States and IAVI G003 in Rwanda and South Africa, the authors show that mRNA delivery of the eOD-GT8 60mer immunogen consistently induces bnAb precursor B cells at high frequencies and with higher levels of somatic hypermutation than previously achieved with protein-based vaccines. In addition, in the G002 trial, heterologous boosting with a second nanoparticle further drove functional maturation, increasing affinity and neutralization activity and generating antibodies with striking structural similarity to mature bnAbs. Despite an increased incidence of skin-related adverse events, these results provide clinical proof of concept for germline-targeting vaccination using mRNA and support the development of additional booster immunogens to induce protective bnAbs against HIV.

This article was previously published in *Science, Vol 389, Issue 6759,* on May 15, 2025.

Read the full article here

4. Defining Health Care "Corporatization"

By Erin C. Fuse Brown

The concept of "corporatization" in health care is not a new phenomenon, its foundations were predicted over four decades ago by Paul Starr. However, the U.S. health care system has now reached a boiling point where the shift toward

integrated control by profit-seeking enterprises has spread to every corner of the industry. This article explores how corporatization has evolved through two key elements: the elevation of shareholder primacy over community welfare and the massive horizontal and vertical consolidation of ownership. While these conglomerates were initially built on the promise of economies of scale, the reality has shifted toward a "Gilded Age" of medicine. Large entities now prioritize revenue-cycle management and investor profits, leading to a system that is increasingly unaffordable and inaccessible for patients, while undermining the professional autonomy of clinicians. Despite traditional policy interventions, corporate giants have continued to amass political power and dodge accountability through regulatory workarounds. The article concludes by arguing that future health policy must move beyond minor reforms and confront a fundamental question: is our health care system meant to serve corporate interests or the members of society as a whole?

This article was previously published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* on July 3, 2025.

Read the full article here

5. How Trump Is Shutting Down the Cancer Research System

By Jonathan Mahler

This article examines how the Trump administration's second-term policies have disrupted the U.S. cancer research system by freezing and canceling grants, delaying reviews, capping indirect-cost reimbursements, terminating federal employees, and proposing a 37 percent cut to the National Cancer Institute. Through the experience of a pediatric brain cancer researcher whose highly rated grant applications stalled amid halted payments and hiring freezes, it shows how laboratories have been forced to shrink, lay off staff, and suspend promising studies. The analysis situates these events within the broader history of federally funded cancer research, emphasizing decades of incremental breakthroughs that increased five-year survival rates from 49 percent in the 1970s to 68 percent today and reduced mortality significantly since the 1990s. It argues that sustained public investment has generated life-saving treatments and broader scientific advances,

while recent funding slowdowns threaten to dismantle a complex ecosystem built over decades and risk delaying or preventing future breakthroughs.

This article was previously published in *The New York Times* on September 14, 2025.

Read the full article here

6. Scientists are discovering a powerful new way to prevent cancer

Cancer-preventing strategies may increasingly focus on boosting "healthy" cell populations rather than only eliminating abnormal ones, based on evidence that many cancer-driver mutations are surprisingly common in normal tissues yet often fail to progress to tumours. The article describes how clonal competition in renewing epithelia can allow fitter (sometimes beneficially mutated) cells to displace neighbours carrying higher-risk mutations, and even eliminate tiny nascent tumours, suggesting prevention could be achieved by tilting this cellular arms race in favour of protective clones. It highlights work on PIK3CA-mutant oesophageal cells showing metabolic advantages that can be countered by inducing similar metabolic states in non-mutated cells (e.g., with metformin in mice), while high-fat diet and obesity appear to favour expansion of the risky clones. The piece also reframes many carcinogens as non-mutagenic promoters that act via chronic inflammation, citing evidence linking air pollution–triggered inflammation to tumour outgrowth and pointing to specific inflammatory mediators (e.g., IL-1β) as actionable prevention targets in animal models.

This article was previously published in *The Economist* on September 2, 2025.

Read the full article here

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