COLUMN
Still a scientist

It is not easy to let go of a scientific identity after leaving the lab — nor is it necessary, says **Chandrika Nair**.

If I choose a career outside the lab, will I still be a scientist? That question often occupies my thoughts as I consider my options post-PhD.
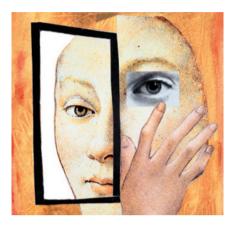
Imagining a future outside research is not easy: I have become accustomed to this environment. But it makes sense, given that more than half of current science PhD students will leave the lab and spread their wings elsewhere (see *Nature* **475,** 533–535; 2011). Perhaps a science-related job could be a workable compromise.

Scientific research relies on a large network of support, from teachers to research councils and charities. There are also editors, journalists and communicators, policy-makers and campaigners. A job in any of these areas could tick the science box — keeping up with research trends as a journalist, for example, or reviewing evidence as a policy-maker.

But would I want to be the person facilitating science rather than doing it myself? Should I exchange my lab coat for a suit? My primary motivation for considering other career paths is that experimental work can be lonely. As I sit pipetting at a fume hood or staring at cells in a darkened room, I admit, I crave human interaction. Still, academic research has many advantages, and the one I treasure most is freedom. Many researchers have flexible schedules and intellectual independence. And the idea of working on basic 'blue skies' research appeals to me. Few other jobs pay their employees to indulge their child-like curiosity, to pursue projects that may or may not succeed.

If I do leave the bench, will I forfeit my identity as a scientist? Can a person be a scientist and not work in a lab? The scientist in me decided to address this deep, dark question by gathering some data. I surveyed nine people working in science-related fields, including a medical charity, a learned society and a research-funding body. The results? Although they no longer consider themselves scientists, all respondents said that their science background has stayed with them. That knowledge and training are relevant to their job on a scale varying from 'occasionally' to 'routinely'.

But what interested me most was the consensus that it is important to have a scientific outlook. The people I asked said that their training affects how they approach problems at work, encouraging them to seek evidence and test ideas. They have exported aspects of the scientific method to real-life settings. One person said that they typically question and research sources of information more than their colleagues who do not have scientific backgrounds.

I do not know what career I will be pursuing in several years' time. One highly desirable scenario would be presenting exciting findings at a conference with several high-impact papers under my belt, maybe a grant or two, and a permanent position within reach. However, I am coming to the pleasant realization that I could easily find fulfilment in other occupations, especially if I feel that I am putting my scientific training to good use.

My very preliminary data suggest that people who have left research might not fit the conventional definition of a scientist, but still retain the identity of scientists by training. As someone who often wishes that important aspects of our lives — from advertising to health care and politics — were more evidence-based, I welcome the possibility of science-literate people having diverse roles in society. Perhaps I will even still be able to call myself "a scientist". ∎

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CORRECTION

The Careers Feature 'Middle Eastern promise' (*Nature* **500,** 111–112) wrongly stated that the New York University Abu Dhabi offers master's-level courses. It does not.

HIRING
US job ads increase

There were 6% more advertisements for US science-related positions posted online in June 2013 than in June 2012, following a 22% increase from 2011 to 2012, according to an analysis of 25,000 recruitment sources including LinkedIn and CareerBuilder. The study, released on 31 July by Wanted Analytics in Quebec City, Canada, also found that the number of employers advertising jobs was up slightly in 2013 after a 15.8% increase from 2011 to 2012. The number of academic posts advertised, however, was down 16.5% from 2012. The biggest increases in recruitment were in San Francisco and Los Angeles, California. In both areas, demand rose by almost one-fifth, owing in part to increased hiring at the University of Southern California and at biomedical research firms including Genentech.

DATA-SHARING
Private beats public

Researchers in some fields are more likely to share data in response to personal requests than by routinely submitting to public repositories, says a study (J. C. Wallis *et al. PLoS ONE* **8,** e67332; 2013). The authors conducted 43 interviews with researchers who use wireless sensing, including biologists and seismologists; in more than two-thirds, participants did not report submitting to repositories, sometimes because a suitable one did not exist or because they wanted to know how data would be used. Co-author Jillian Wallis, an information-studies researcher at the University of California, Los Angeles, emphasizes that using repositories makes data easier to find and increases citations.

ACADEMIA
US health premiums rise

More than one-quarter of US academic institutions said in a survey that they had raised the costs of health-care premiums for faculty members and staff this year in preparation for the Affordable Care Act, which is set to ramp up in 2014. The 2013 *Employee Health Benefits Survey of Higher Education* by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources in Knoxville, Tennessee, found that premiums rose by an average of 3.25% for employee-only plans and 5% for employee–family plans. Two-thirds of respondents said that they are still trying to determine which adjunct or part-time faculty members are eligible for benefits.