Biomedical Computing: Digitizing Life in the United States (The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science)

Joseph A. November

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Imagine biology and medicine today without computers. What would laboratory work be like if electronic databases and statistical software did not exist? Would disciplines like genomics even be feasible if we lacked the means to manage and manipulate huge volumes of digital data? How would patients fare in a world absent CT scans, programmable pacemakers, and computerized medical records?

Today, computers are a critical component of almost all research in biology and medicine. Yet, just fifty years ago, the study of life was by far the least digitized field of science, its living subject matter thought too complex and dynamic to be meaningfully analyzed by logic-driven computers. In this long-overdue study, historian Joseph November explores the early attempts, in the 1950s and 1960s, to computerize biomedical research in the United States.

Computers and biomedical research are now so intimately connected that it is difficult to imagine when such critical work was offline. *Biomedical Computing* transports readers back to such a time and investigates how computers first appeared in the research lab and doctor's office. November examines the conditions that made possible the computerization of biology—including strong technological, institutional, and political support from the National Institutes of Health—and shows not only how digital technology transformed the life sciences but also how the intersection of the two led to important developments in computer architecture and software design.

The history of this phenomenon has been only vaguely understood. November's thoroughly researched and lively study makes clear for readers the motives behind computerizing the study of life and how that technology profoundly affects biomedical research today.

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