

The Pathologists' Assistant



The pathologists' assistant (PA) serves as the eyes of the pathologist. Pathologists examine samples of skin or organ tissue to diagnose a disease. Oftentimes the pathologists' assistant is the first person to look at the sample when it comes from the operating room or a physician's office. The pathologists' assistant provides a general description of the sample and decides if it needs to be analyzed in greater detail. The pathologist, a medical doctor, reviews microscopic slides and makes a final diagnosis. On any given day, a pathologists' assistant could be describing samples taken from tonsils or a mole.

Enter the autopsy room. Pathologists' assistants have the important responsibility to examine

corpses. They review the medical history of the person who has died and decide with the pathologist how to perform the autopsy to determine the cause of death.

In addition to their medical responsibilities, pathologists' assistants often help make sure the pathology laboratory runs smoothly. The surgical pathology laboratory is the place where tissue samples are examined and diseases are diagnosed. It takes a lot of work to keep track of all the activity in the laboratory. Pathologists' assistants enjoy the variety of their work. Depending on where they work, pathologists' assistants may be responsible for recordkeeping, billing, computer systems, and supervision of technical employees.

*"I cannot speak highly enough for my profession.
I have never met a pathologists' assistant in
pathology who hates their job."*

Careers
in Pathology and Medical Laboratory Science

Minimum Education Requirement: (PA)

A baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited college or university and successful completion of an accredited Pathologists' Assistant program.



Career Preparation

To prepare for a career as a pathologists' assistant, you should get a solid foundation in high school and college science and math, including classes in biology, chemistry, calculus. In most cases, you'll need to earn a bachelor's degree to qualify for admission to a training program for pathologists' assistants. Most training programs are graduate level programs that lead to a master's degree.

Scholarships

Through the generous contributions of its members and support from Dade Behring, Inc., the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) offers scholarships to qualified students enrolled in approved laboratory science educational and training programs. All scholarship selection criteria include academic achievement, leadership abilities and community activities, professional goals, and endorsements from faculty and community leaders.

Certification

To be sure that laboratory workers are competent and able to perform high quality laboratory tests, the Board of Registry of the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) gives a national certification exam. Students take this exam after meeting their academic and laboratory education requirements. To be eligible for the pathologists' assistant certification exam, applicants must have a baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited college or university and successful completion of a pathologists' assistant program accredited by the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences within the previous five years. Applicants may also qualify for the exam with a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college or university with 20 semester hours (or 30 quarter hours) of biology, and three years full-time acceptable experience as a pathologists' assistant within the past 10 years. This on-the-job training route will be discontinued Jan. 1, 2008. Those who pass the exam may use the initials PA(ASCP) after their names to show they are proficient in their field. Certification is valid for three years. To demonstrate competency throughout their careers after their initial certification, pathologists' assistants must complete a Certification Maintenance Program every three years.

Job Opportunities

As demands upon pathologists continue to grow, opportunities for pathologists' assistants grow with them. Expect this field to see further growth in the coming years.

Key Contacts

American Society for Clinical Pathology
33 W. Monroe, Suite 1600, Chicago, IL 60603
Phone: 312-541-4999 or 800-267-ASCP (2727)
Fax: 312-541-4845, info@ascp.org
Certification: www.ascp.org/certification/
Careers: www.ascp.org/careerlinks/
Scholarships: www.ascp.org/careerlinks/scholarships/
General ASCP: www.ascp.org

National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences
Accredited Programs: www.naacls.org/search/programs.asp

American Association of Pathologists' Assistants
www.pathologistsassistants.org

The American Society for Clinical Pathology provides excellence in education, certification, and advocacy on behalf of patients, pathologists, and laboratory professionals. Founded in 1922, ASCP is a professional society with 140,000 member pathologists and medical laboratory professionals.