



PATHOLOGY WORKFORCE

WHAT DOES A PATHOLOGIST DO?

Pathologists are physicians who specialize in diagnosing diseases by examining tissues, cells, blood, and other body fluids. Often called the “doctor’s doctor,” pathologists devote their careers to providing answers to diagnostic questions that provide the information our clinical colleagues need to best treat our patients.

Pathologists are vital members of the patient care team. In addition to practicing diagnostic medicine, pathologists actively contribute to patient care by participating in multidisciplinary tumor boards, lab test utilization committees, and infection control teams, where their expertise helps guide treatment decisions and improve healthcare quality.

Pathologists often serve as directors of medical laboratories, overseeing skilled laboratory scientists and ensuring that patients receive timely, accurate, reliable, state-of-the-art diagnostic testing. While much of our work is done outside of a clinic setting, many pathologists interact with their patients during biopsy procedures and even sometimes in clinics where pathologists discuss pathology reports directly with patients.

Pathology is a very diverse field of medicine. There are many different career opportunities for doctors who specialize in pathology.

TYPICAL ACTIVITIES

Anatomic Pathology (Surgical Pathology, Cytopathology, Hematopathology, and Autopsy Pathology):

- Examine specimens from biopsies and surgical procedures to make a diagnosis, and provide this information to other members of the patient care team
- Interpret molecular biomarker testing, to provide information to drive personalized treatment
- Review surgical specimens intraoperatively (frozen sections) to help guide patient management in real time
- Inform and educate colleagues about ever-evolving classification of diseases and current guidelines for treatment
- Perform fine needle aspirates (FNAs) and biopsies on lesions, and perform rapid onsite evaluation (ROSE) of fine needle aspirates and biopsies at the patient's bedside
- Evaluate blood smears, bone marrow biopsies, and lymph node biopsies to diagnose hematologic disorders
- Collaborate with clinicians at tumor boards to integrate pathology findings with radiology and patient history, ensuring comprehensive patient care
- Conduct autopsies to determine cause of death, understand disease processes, and contribute to public health knowledge

Clinical Pathology:

- Interpret diagnostic testing in areas like chemistry, hematology, microbiology, immunology, and molecular diagnostic tests that guide diagnosis and treatment, and monitor disease
- Identify infectious diseases using cultures, molecular methods, rapid antigen testing, and help guide appropriate therapy through the identification of antimicrobial susceptibilities and resistance
- Manage the transfusion medicine service, ensuring safe administration of blood products and responding to emergencies like massive transfusions or antibody incompatibility
- Oversee overall laboratory activities and ensure compliance with regulatory guidelines
- Review and approve the implementation of all new laboratory testing and validation
- Interact with hospital leadership to advocate for high-quality and safe laboratory practices in the workplace

SALARY

Mean Annual Salary*: \$245,000-500,000 (Median*: \$255,000-420,000)

**Based on years of experience, practice setting*



SUBDISCIPLINES

Surgical Pathology

**Blood Banking/
Transfusion Medicine**

Chemical Pathology

Clinical Informatics

Cytopathology

Dermatopathology

Forensic Pathology

Hematopathology

Medical Microbiology

**Molecular Genetic
Pathology**

Neuropathology

Pediatric Pathology

EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATION

Residency Training

- Most residents complete a combined Anatomic and Clinical Pathology (AP/CP) program (4 years).
- Alternatively, residents may choose Anatomic Pathology (AP) only or Clinical Pathology (CP) only (3 years).
- A clinical intern year is not required for pathology.
- On-call responsibilities are usually taken from home.

Fellowship Training

For many pathologists, a 1-year fellowship is typically pursued after residency. This is optional, but common.

Board Certification

After completing residency and/or fellowship, pathologists take certification exams through the American Board of Pathology (abpath.org/get-certified) to become board-certified in their specialty.

Primary Certification

abpath.org/primary-certification

- Certification is available in: Anatomic Pathology (AP), Clinical Pathology (CP) or a combined AP/CP track
- Exam format: Pass/Fail
- Eligibility Requirements:
 - » MD or DO degree from an accredited U.S. medical school, or an equivalent international medical school acceptable to the American Board of Pathology
 - » Passage of USMLE Step 3 (or equivalent COMLEX for DOs)
 - » Completion of at least 30 autopsies
 - » Completion of an accredited pathology residency program (AP, CP, or AP/CP)

Subspecialty Certification

abpath.org/subspecialty-certification

- After primary certification, pathologists may pursue certification in subspecialties.
- Most subspecialties require completion of a 1-year ACGME-accredited fellowship in that area.



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NECESSARY SKILLSETS



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Medical Knowledge

- In-depth understanding of the pathologic basis of disease
- Familiarity with molecular and genetic basis of diseases

Critical Thinking

- Diagnostic reasoning to differentiate among similar diseases
- Ability to guide test ordering and interpret laboratory results

Communication Skills

- Clear reporting and documentation of findings
- Effective communication with patients, families, patient-facing providers, and other healthcare professionals

Technical & IT Proficiency

- Competency with laboratory information systems (LIS) and electronic health records (EHR)
- Familiarity with digital pathology platforms, image analysis software and application of artificial intelligence

Organization & Time Management

- Ability to efficiently manage workload to provide timely answers to patients, families, and other healthcare professionals
- Prioritization of urgent cases (e.g., intraoperative consultations/frozen sections)

Continuous Learning

- Engagement with continuing medical education (CME)
- Staying current with evolving diagnostic tools and disease classification systems

Other Skills

- Emotional resilience when dealing with critical cases and delivering results to patients, families, and other healthcare professionals
- Collaborative approach in multidisciplinary care teams

References

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