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What's The Real Story About Pathology?



Top 10 Myths about Pathology

Medical students come up with a lot of reasons why they don't go into pathology. Unfortunately, most of them are based on myths and misinformation. It's time to set the record straight.

10. *“Pathology residents must complete a clinical transition year before starting their pathology training.”*

Medical students go directly from their fourth year in medical school into pathology residency.

9. *“Pathology residents must complete a ‘credentialing’ year after completing their residency training.”*

The American Board of Pathology recently dropped the “credentialing” year, reducing the length of combined anatomical and clinical pathology training to four years.

8. *“Pathologists are not well compensated.”*

According to a recent survey by the ASCP Resident Council, 47% of graduating pathology residents who took jobs in 2008 had a starting salary of more than \$150,000.

7. *“I want to subspecialize and that isn't possible in pathology.”*

Pathology offers more than 20 subspecialties: blood banking/transfusion medicine, breast pathology, cardiovascular pathology, chemical pathology, cytopathology, dermatopathology, forensic pathology, gastrointestinal pathology, genitourinary pathology, gynecologic pathology, hematopathology, hepatopathology, medical microbiology, molecular diagnostics, musculoskeletal pathology, neuropathology, pathology informatics, pediatric pathology, pulmonary pathology, renal pathology, surgical pathology, and toxicology.

6. *“If I want to be a pathologist, I will have to stay in academics or work for a big hospital.”*

Most pathologists work in private practices ranging in size from one to 15 or more pathologists. While academia and large hospitals are options, so are national clinical laboratories and research labs.

5. *“Pathologists spend most of their time doing research.”*

Most pathologists are primarily focused on their clinical work and have little time for general scientific research. However, those who work in academic institutions are often engaged in clinical research projects.

4. *“Pathologists are not involved in patient care.”*

Pathologists are extensively involved in almost every aspect of patient care through the anatomic and clinical services that they provide. Input from pathologists guides decisions about surgery and helps clinicians determine appropriate treatment. For instance, a pathologist's finding may help an oncologist determine whether to give chemotherapy or radiotherapy. As a pathologist, your work is absolutely essential to almost every clinical decision.

3. *“Pathology is like the show ‘CSI.’”*

“CSI” is about forensic pathology, one of a long list of pathology subspecialties. Also, forensic pathologists represent fewer than 5 percent of all pathologists.

2. *“Pathologists and pathology residents perform autopsies all day long.”*

More than 99.9% of samples analyzed by pathologists are from living people.

1. *“Looking into the microscope makes me sick, so I couldn't possibly go into pathology.”*

Pathologists say it usually takes only a week or two of experience to get accustomed to the microscope, and it's well worth it.

