



TOP myths about Pathology



1

“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. They also participate in, perform, and oversee procedures, such as fine-needle aspirations, bone marrow aspirations/biopsies, and apheresis procedures. Pathologists regularly participate in multidisciplinary conferences, such as Tumor Board, and help the primary team and specialist consultants determine appropriate therapy (eg, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, or both). As a pathologist, your work is absolutely essential to most clinical decisions.

2

“Pathologists are not well compensated.”

According to a recent survey by the ASCP Resident Council, 75% of graduating pathology residents who took jobs in 2010 had a starting salary of more than \$150,000. Additionally, up to half of pathologists who pursue fellowships, such as hematopathology or dermatopathology, can expect starting salaries of more than \$200,000.

3

“Pathologists don’t like people.”

Although not all pathologists directly interact with patients on a regular basis, they spend large portions of their day in consultation with fellow physicians, thus providing specialized expertise. For this reason, pathologists are sometimes called “the doctor’s doctor”. In addition, the pathologist is responsible for laboratory performance, which includes managing technical and clerical personnel. Consequently, interpersonal communication and leadership skills are paramount. As physicians and managers, pathologists’ communication is critical to ensuring patient welfare.

4

“Pathologists and Pathology residents perform autopsies all day long.”

More than 99.9% of samples analyzed by pathologists are from (living) patients. Most practicing pathologists are either rarely or never responsible for performing or supervising autopsies. This duty is more commonly performed by a subspecialist, the “forensic pathologist”.

5

“Pathologists spend most of their time in a lab or do research all day.”

Most pathologists are primarily focused on their clinical work and have little time for general scientific research. However, those who work in academic institutions may elect to engage in clinical or translational research projects, often in combination with a diagnostic pathology practice.



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6

“Pathology is like the show ‘CSI’.”

Sometimes! “CSI” is about forensic pathology, one of many pathology subspecialties. Pathologists in this subspecialty, however, represent fewer than 5 percent of all pathologists.

7

“Looking into the microscope makes me sick.”

Pathologists say it usually takes only a week or two of experience to get accustomed to the microscope--and it's well worth it! Additionally, many pathology subspecialties in clinical pathology (eg, clinical chemistry or molecular diagnostics) require little or no microscopy.

8

“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 1 to 15 or more pathologists. While academia and large hospitals are options, so are national clinical laboratories and research labs. Pathologists may also work in the pharmaceutical and technical industries. The possibilities are endless!

9

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

Pathology offers more than 20 subspecialties spanning the breadth of anatomic and clinical pathology. Anatomic pathology subspecialties include dermatopathology, gastrointestinal/hepatic pathology, genitourinary pathology, gynecologic pathology, breast pathology, bone and soft tissue pathology, neuropathology, renal pathology, pulmonary pathology, cardiovascular pathology, cytopathology and forensic pathology. Clinical pathology subspecialties include hematopathology, cytogenetics, molecular pathology, blood banking/transfusion medicine, clinical chemistry, and medical microbiology.

10

“Pathology residents must complete a clinical transitional or preliminary year, like other specialties.”

Medical students go directly from their fourth year in medical school into pathology residency. No preliminary or transitional year is required.