



Pathology is all about dead bodies

Most television pathologists are forensic pathologists, however, this is not the case in the real world. Only 22% of pathologists are histopathologists (the ones who do autopsies). However, many histopathologists do not perform autopsies and those who do generally spend only a few hours per week doing them, as most of their time is spent looking at samples from living patients. Forensic pathologists make up less than 1% of pathologists. This is a very small number, fewer than 100 people in the country.

Pathology is just one specialty

There are 18 different specialties in pathology and the number grows every year. This includes toxicology, cytogenetics, veterinary pathology and clinical embryology to name a few.

Pathologists don't take care of patients

In a recent survey, only 6% thought that pathologists looked after patients in hospital. Although not all pathologists have direct patient contact, many do, for example, haematologists, clinical biochemists, immunologists and medical microbiologists. Additionally, the vast majority of all pathologists' work is done for the benefit of living patients.

Pathologists work alone in labs doing tedious repetitive jobs

When they're not in the autopsy room, do pathologists spend all day in laboratories? Pathologists are members of multi-disciplinary teams and work with others to care for patients. Pathology is varied and interesting with many of the more repetitive jobs now done by machines.

Pathologists don't diagnose cancer

In a recent survey, only 29% of the public knew that pathologists diagnose cancer. In histopathology particularly, a large part of the work involves diagnosing cancer and studying tissue to work out what sort of cancer it is and how far it has spread so that the correct treatment can be chosen. In fact, almost all cancers are diagnosed by pathologists. Diagnoses may be made by testing blood, urine or other fluids or from a biopsy. Pathologists tell other doctors what type of cancer you've got and how far it has spread so they know what treatment to offer.

You have to be a doctor to work in pathology

In fact most people who work in pathology are not doctors, but scientists. These clinical and biomedical scientists train to become experts in the different pathology specialties and work with doctors to provide care for patients. There are nearly 20,000 scientists working in pathology.

Pathology is an unpopular specialty

For several years there have been vacancies in pathology. This has given some people the mistaken impression that pathology is unpopular and that the vacancies are there because no one wants to work in the specialty. Entry to pathology training is competitive, for example in molecular genetics: there were 70 applicants for the last post and in clinical embryology there were 117 applicants for 1 post.