

An interest in all fields of medicine is required



The job file **Pathologist**

What is pathology?

Pathology is the branch of medicine involved in understanding the causes and processes of disease. Pathologists do this by looking at changes in the tissues of the body and in blood and other body fluids. Advances in pathology are integral to the development and success of modern medicine. Doctors or specialists having difficulty diagnosing the exact cause of a patient's illness send specimens to the local pathology laboratory for analysis.

What training is required to qualify as a pathologist?

All pathologists first qualify as general practitioners. They then do an additional four to five years' postgraduate study in laboratory medicine (depending on their speciality) to qualify.

What is the difference between a pathologist and a medical laboratory technologist?

A pathologist is a medically trained doctor with a specific postgraduate qualification in laboratory medicine. A pathologist's academic background and clinical experience enable him to analyse and interpret test results and then provide professional, diagnostic advice.

The pathologist works with a team of medical technologists and technicians, who operate sophisticated laboratory equipment. Technologists provide the test results, but are not able to offer clinical advice on patient treatment and disease prevention/intervention.

What happens when a specimen arrives at the laboratory?

Medium to large sized pathology laboratories receive between

3 000 and 5 000 specimens a day. These are carefully labelled and barcoded to ensure the correct results get returned to each patient. The samples are then distributed to the various departments, where they undergo tests requested by the patient's doctor.

Once the laboratory technologists have obtained the results for a particular specimen, they are forwarded to the pathologist for examination and analysis. Following final diagnosis and recommendation, a report is forwarded to the referring doctor.

Is pathology an option for students who also have an interest in business?

Pathology accounts for about 3% of total medical bills, but pathology services are critical to the accurate diagnosis and treatment of disease, and contribute significantly to cost-effective patient care. Because of the specialised nature of the profession, and the need to constantly update technological equipment, most pathology practices have national networks to make efficient use of resources.

What attributes do you need to be a successful pathologist?

To be a successful pathologist you need to be a logical and creative thinker, able to consider a problem from all angles. You must also be precise and accurate and be able to work independently. A broad interest in all fields of medicine is critical, as pathologists have to consult with doctors from every speciality. Some practices also require knowledge of surgical skills.

■ Information supplied by The National Pathology Group. They can be contacted on 011-482-8212.