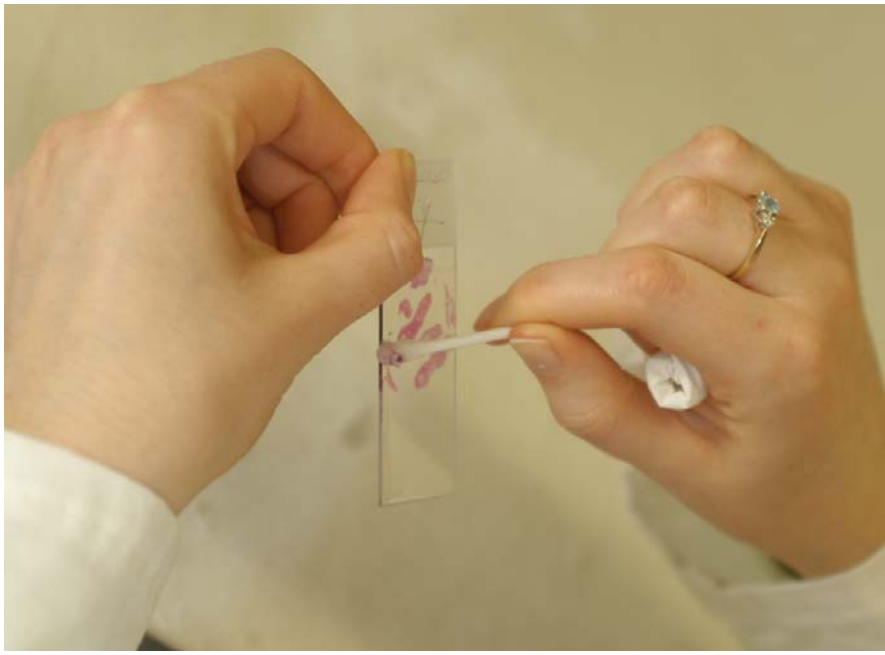
Histopathology, cytopathology and anatomical pathology

NHS Careers

Join the team and make a difference

Histopathology and cytopathology make up the broader area of cellular pathology, and are vital for detecting and increasing our understanding of illnesses such as cancer. Anatomical pathology refers to the work done in mortuaries.



What will you do?

In **histopathology**, you will examine samples taken from surgical operations or postmortem examinations, assisting the pathologist and examining tissues under the microscope. You will make decisions about how best to deal with each sample and will regularly use a variety of specialised techniques to aid diagnosis and identify abnormalities.

You will work as part of a team and come into regular contact with the pathologists, as well as laboratory assistants, secretarial staff and porters who carry the samples to the lab.

The work of scientists in **cytopathology** falls into two categories – cervical and non-cervical cytology. If you decide to go into this area, you will do a combination of both.

Cervical cytology involves studying samples from smear tests and looking for any changes that might indicate the presence of invasive cancer. Within non-cervical cytology, you will take cells from different types of fluid elsewhere in the body.

You will also do a lot of reporting on and interpretation of the results you obtain.

You will be based in the lab, with minimal patient contact, but will always need to be aware of the impact your findings have on people's lives.

Anatomical pathology technologists (APTs) assist pathologists during post-mortems by making incisions, removing organs and noting down observations. A key element of your work will be taking samples for examination. You will also assist the pathologist in helping to determine or confirm the cause of death. After a post-mortem, you will prepare the deceased for storage, or collection by the undertaker or relatives.

Your other responsibilities will include care of the deceased patient, updating mortuary records, ensuring property is kept safe for relatives and checking that any legal

documents are completed correctly. You may also be required to offer support to the bereaved.

As well as working closely with the pathologist on a daily basis, you will come into regular contact with relatives. You'll also be liaising with paramedics, funeral directors, clinicians, nursing staff, the prison service, the police force and any organisation involved in investigating causes of death.

What entry routes are available?

To work as a biomedical scientist, you'll need a biomedical science degree accredited by the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) or approved by the Health Professions Council, before applying for a post as a trainee biomedical scientist. After joining the NHS, you will receive training in the relevant areas. The training will take up to two years and will enable you to register with the Health Professions Council.

There are no formal entry requirements to work in cervical cytology as training is on the job. After around two years' practical training, you will be able to sit for the City and Guilds Diploma in cervical cytology to become a qualified cervical cytology screener.

There are no minimum qualifications for trainee anatomical pathology technologists, although employers will usually expect you to have a good knowledge of science and a range of GCSEs may be beneficial. Once you have joined, you will train to obtain your Certificate in Anatomical Pathology Technology and the Diploma in Anatomical Pathology Technology. Experienced APTs are eligible to register with the Voluntary Registration Council for Healthcare Scientists.
If you have a first-class or upper second-class degree in a relevant subject, you may be eligible to join the NHS Clinical Scientists Training Scheme. This is a four-year programme of in-depth training in a specialist area, usually leading to an MSc or specialist postgraduate diploma, and registration with the Health Professions Council. For more information, visit **www.nhsclinicalscientists.info**

For more information on the range of opportunities available in healthcare science, please visit **www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/qualifications**. This gives more specific

details about what qualifications are necessary for each role. You can search for current vacancies and download job descriptions at **www.jobs.nhs.uk**

How can you develop your career?

There are excellent career prospects that include openings for research, management and education. You will be encouraged to continually expand your knowledge as advances are made. With training, responsibility and experience, you could reach the highest level in the profession, attaining consultant status, at which level you are likely to be in charge of a large department or making a significant contribution to your area of expertise.

Find out more about what training is open to you and how you can develop your career, at **www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/training**

As well as moving to more senior and specialised roles within this area, you will also have the opportunity to take on additional responsibilities and progress within the organisation as part of the Career Framework. For more information about this initiative, please see the *Careers in healthcare science* booklet.

Where will you work?	What skills and qualities will you need?
In histopathology and cytopathology you will be based in the cellular pathology departments. You may also need to visit clinics to take samples, and often return to the lab to prepare and test them, while the patient is still there. In anatomical pathology, you will work mainly in the mortuary.	• an interest in human biology • good verbal and written skills – you will frequently need to interpret and report on your findings • discretion and compassion – this is particularly important for mortuary work • good concentration – you will spend long periods examining samples under a microscope • IT skills – many results are entered directly into computer programs now • speed and accuracy – results will often be needed quickly, but must always be accurate • ability to work well as part of a team

Pay

The national pay system in the NHS is called Agenda for Change (AfC). This applies to all staff except doctors, dentists and very senior managers. These are examples of roles and the AfC bands at which they may be paid: healthcare science support worker (Band 2); healthcare science assistant (Band 4); healthcare science practitioner (Band 5); healthcare science specialist (Band 6); healthcare science advanced (Band 7); healthcare science consultant (Band 8a-c).

For more information, visit **www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/payandbenefits**

To find out more about careers in this area of healthcare science, please go to www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/working

For more information on the professional bodies relevant to healthcare science, please visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/contacts

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