

Cytopathology

Cytopathology is a branch of pathology involving the study and diagnosis of diseases at the cellular level using a light microscope.

Traditionally the discipline has been divided into cervical cytopathology (commonly referred to as cervical cytology) and diagnostic cytopathology.



Diagnostic cytology is mainly used for diagnosis of cancer in many parts of the body

Working life

You may have heard about the cervical screening programme that has been very successful and has significantly reduced the incidence of cervical cancer since it started in 1998.

Diagnostic cytology is mainly used for diagnosis of cancer in many parts of the body including the [respiratory](#) ^[1] tract, urinary tract, lymph nodes and the thyroid. This is an exciting and expanding area. In many hospitals healthcare scientists are involved at the time of sample collection and work with the clinician to ensure adequate material is collected for diagnosis and further tests such as molecular testing.

If you work in cytopathology and cervical cytology, you'll be screening cervical samples and examining them for abnormalities. The samples are taken from the patient as a smear by a nurse ^[2] or doctor ^[3] and put onto slides which are then sent to the cytology laboratory where they are processed and passed to you, if you're working as a cervical cytology screener.

As a cervical cytology screener, you will:

- use a microscope to examine cells to screen for abnormalities that may be the first signs of cervical cancer, so that the disease can be prevented from spreading
- decide whether there is any abnormality, and if there is, notify a doctor who would take the necessary action to provide the best healthcare outcome of the patient

Although you'd be supervised by a biomedical scientist ^[4], you'd be responsible for the accuracy of your own work, and so you'd have a high level of responsibility.

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Entry requirements, skills and interests

You'll need GCSEs or equivalent qualifications at levels 2 or 3 leading to entry at healthcare science associate or assistant level.

There are sometimes opportunities to enter at associate level through an apprenticeship ^[5] and work towards a QCF level-3 qualification in healthcare science.

Skills, qualities and interests needed

To work as a cervical cytology screener, you'll need:

- an interest in science and technology
- good communication skills to be able to liaise with the healthcare team
- to be comfortable using modern technology and complex equipment
- to be able to follow clear instructions and procedures
- to pay great attention to detail and to produce highly accurate work even when under pressure

- to be able to work as part of a team.

If you're applying for a healthcare science role or training position either in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services you'll be asked to show how you think the NHS values apply in your everyday work. The NHS values form a key part of the [NHS Constitution](#) [6].

Find out more about the NHS Constitution [7].

Training and development

To become a competent cytology screener you'll follow an intensive period of training and after two years you'll be assessed with an external screening exam (the Cervical Screening Programme Certificate in Cervical Cytology) before you can work on the cervical screening programme.

Training is on the job and there is also an intensive residential course that last for a few weeks. You'd normally attend a course near the beginning of the training and again when you've been working in a laboratory for between six and twelve months.

Where the role can lead

Once in post as a healthcare science associate or assistant you'll work towards relevant healthcare science qualifications (QCF, NVQs and foundation degrees (or equivalent)) while you're working. These are underpinned by an awards and qualifications framework.

Continuing professional development

As part of your development you will be expected to do continuing professional development (CPD) to show that you are keeping yourself up to date with the policies and procedures in your area of work.

Find out more general information about professional development [8]

Accredited Scientific Practice- development opportunities for healthcare science staff

Accredited Scientific Practice (ASP) provides an additional route for your ongoing professional and scientific development as part of the healthcare science (HCS) workforce. ASP allows employers to develop bespoke, responsive, short course programmes to meet training needs within the HCS workforce. ASP programmes provide you with a quality assured, rigorously assessed qualification which can lead to voluntary professional registration with the Academy for Healthcare Sciences (AHCS).

An ASP programme involves work based learning with academic study of modules from the National School of Healthcare Science (NSHCS) portfolio programmes. Access to an e-portfolio is provided to record learning in the workplace while associated academic

study is completed independently through an accredited university provider. In some cases, completion of academic study may also lead to an award of a postgraduate qualification from the university provider.

Read more about ASP on the NSHCS website ^[9].

- **Pay and conditions**

Most jobs in the NHS are covered by the Agenda for Change (AfC) ^[10] pay scales. This pay system covers all staff except doctors, dentists and the most senior managers. Salaries for healthcare science staff working in cytopathology will range typically range from AfC ^[11] bands 2 to 4, depending on the role and level of responsibility.

NHS staff will usually work a standard 37.5 hours per week. They may work a shift pattern.

Terms and conditions of service can vary for employers outside the NHS.

- **Job vacancies and further information**

Finding and applying for jobs

When you're looking for job or apprenticeship vacancies, there are a number of sources you can use, depending on the type of work you're seeking.

Check vacancies carefully to be sure you meet the requirements of the person specification before applying, and to find out what the application process is. You may need to apply online or send a CV for example.

You can apply for job vacancies for cervical cytology screeners and healthcare science assistant and associate roles through the NHS Jobs website ^[12].

Other key sources you might use:

- Vacancies in local government can be found on the Local Government Jobs website ^[13] and the Jobs Go Public website ^[14]
- Vacancies for apprenticeships appear on the Gov.uk website ^[15]

As well as these sources, you may find suitable vacancies in the health sector by contacting local employers directly, searching in local newspapers and by using the Universal Jobmatch tool [16].

Find out more about applications and interviews [17].

Volunteering is an excellent way of gaining experience (especially if you don't have enough for a specific paid job you're interested in) and also seeing whether you're suited to a particular type of work. It's also a great way to boost your confidence and you can give something back to the community.

Find out more about volunteering and gaining experience [18].

Further information

For further information about working and training in cytopathology, contact:

- British Association for Cytopathology [19]
- Institute of Biomedical Science [20]

Other roles that may interest you

- Biomedical science [21]
- Cellular sciences [22]
- Experienced paramedic [23]
- Health records staff [24]

Source URL: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/healthcare-science/roles-healthcare-science/life-sciences/cytopathology>

Links

- [1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Respiratory>
- [2] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/nursing>
- [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/general-practice-gp>
- [4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/life-sciences/biomedical-science>
- [5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/secondary-school-or-fe-college/apprenticeships-traineeships-and-cadet-schemes>
- [6] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#NHS_Constitution
- [7] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/working-health/nhs-constitution>
- [8] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/developing-your-career/personal-and-professional-development>
- [9] <http://www.nshcs.hee.nhs.uk/join-a-programme-asp/accredited-scientific-practice>
- [10] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/careers-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates>
- [11] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#AfC>
- [12] <http://www.jobs.nhs.uk>
- [13] <http://www.lgjobs.com/>
- [14] <http://www.jobsgopublic.com/>
- [15] <https://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship>
- [16] <https://www.gov.uk/jobsearch>
- [17] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/offering-career-support/training-and-teaching-resources-young-people/application>

- [18] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/secondary-school-or-fe-college/gaining-experience>
- [19] <http://www.britishcytology.org.uk/>
- [20] <http://www.ibms.org/>
- [21] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/healthcare-science/roles-healthcare-science/life-sciences/biomedical-science>
- [22] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/healthcare-science/roles-healthcare-science/life-sciences/cellular-sciences>
- [23] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/ambulance-service-team/roles-ambulance-service/experienced-paramedic>
- [24] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/wider-healthcare-team/roles-wider-healthcare-team/health-records-staff>