

## Working life (histopathology)

This page provides useful information on the working week as well as any on-call and other commitments, along with information on who you will work with. The attractions and challenges of the job are also in this section.

“I wanted to work in a specialty that would continue to offer intellectual stimulation throughout my career. Histopathology provides the opportunity to learn, conduct research, teach and have a management role, all while employing the latest knowledge and techniques to solve clinical problems.” (Consultant histopathologist)

An average day may begin at 7.30am, performing coronial autopsies before attending a multidisciplinary team meeting to present the week’s cancer cases at 9am. After this, surgical specimens from operating theatres, radiology, outpatient clinics and general practice may be examined.

The appropriate samples would then be carefully selected, to ensure best representation of abnormal tissue for microscopy slides. The bulk of the day’s work usually consists of examining such slides under a microscope and formulating clinical reports. This specialty is consultant-led, meaning that consultants will generally look at all the samples being analysed.

While working at the laboratory, the histopathologist might reveal the findings of a recent clinical audit at a departmental management meeting. It’s not unusual for an urgent ‘frozen section’ from the operating theatre, or similar critical requirement, to interrupt an afternoon reporting session. Impromptu educational meetings with PhD students may also interrupt work.

If undertaking a joint specialist clinic, a pathologist may see up to ten patients a day. However, more often they will examine tissues from some 70 patients – all awaiting a pathological diagnosis.

Medical school visits, to give an undergraduate lecture, are often part of the daily duties for histopathologists. At regular intervals, they act as educational supervisors for trainee histopathologists who need to review their reports under supervision. Some histopathologists run joint specialist clinics with surgeons, obtaining and reporting fine-needle aspirations.

Most of the work is microscopy (at the desk in your office), or cutting up specimens at the laboratory bench. In addition to this, histopathologists will usually be involved in multidisciplinary team meetings with clinicians in various settings around the hospital. Some time may be spent in the mortuary – on average around a half-day each week.

Many histopathologists spend part of their week involved in clinical research and audit.

Histopathologists generally work fairly regular hours, although there may be some on-call work on an occasional basis. ?

The EU Working Time Directive limits the working week to 48 hours. It is also possible to work part-time once you are consultant, or to train on a less than full-time [1] basis (conditions apply).

- Who you will work with?

Expand / collapse

Histopathologists work as part of large multidisciplinary teams.

They work with:

- a wide range of surgeons and physicians
  - anatomical pathology technicians in the mortuary
  - biomedical scientists
  - GPs
  - specialist nurses
  - radiologists
  - secretaries and administrative staff
- Attractions and challenges of the role

Expand / collapse

Acquiring knowledge, keeping up to date with relevant information and applying this expertise to solve clinical problems provides immense intellectual stimulation and satisfaction.

The lifelong study of disease, combined with the constant requirement to diagnose clinical conditions, creates one of the most rewarding and intellectually challenging career choices for an individual with a genuine interest in the subject of medicine.

Histopathologists find their work very rewarding, as they are making a vital contribution to disease diagnosis. Although there is very little patient contact, you are helping patients in a very important way.

Because the on-call commitment is minimal and direct management of patients lies with other doctors, this is a specialty where a good work-life balance can readily be achieved.

While certain diagnoses can be easy to make, others can be challenging ? or seemingly impossible. Small, but highly significant findings can be easily overlooked amid a mass of distraction, especially under time pressure.

Immense mental concentration for sustained periods is required, which can be exhausting even if the physical demands of the day job appear light. However, this means most days are finished with a sense of real satisfaction and achievement.

---

**Source URL:** <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/doctors/roles-doctors/pathology/histopathology-doctor/working-life>

### Links

[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/i-am/working-health/information-doctors/less-full-time-training-doctors>