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## Pathologists' Assistant

### Overview

A pathologists' assistant is an intensively trained allied health professional who provides anatomic pathology services under the direction and supervision of a pathologist. A pathologists' assistant is qualified to do all the work leading up to (but not including) diagnosis - including tissue banking, gross examination of surgical pathology specimens, and complex surgical resections and autopsies.

At the direction and under the supervision of a pathologist(s), a pathologists' assistant may perform the following tasks and assume responsibility for:

- Preparation, gross description and dissection of human tissue surgical specimens
- Preparation of human postmortem examinations
- Teaching courses in human anatomy and physiology, histology, gross pathology, gross and microscopic photography and gross dissection skills for both surgical and autopsy pathology.
- Performance of various managerial and/or administrative duties, including handling budgets, supervising employees, etc.

By performing such a wide array of tasks, pathologists' assistants make a significant contribution to the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of a laboratory or pathology practice.

### Working Conditions

Many pathologists' assistants work in community hospitals, while others work in community/public or government hospitals, reference laboratories, academic centers (i.e., medical schools or university hospitals), or within the Medical Examiners system.

Entry-level salaries in this field average \$72,000; the range for new graduates usually runs from the high \$60Ks to as much as \$90K, depending upon workload, setting, and regional cost of living. Sign-on/retention bonuses and annual bonuses are becoming more frequent, as well. Experienced PAs can earn as much as the low six figures.

With a pathologists' assistant degree, you can find a job virtually anywhere in the United States, as well as in Canada, Australia, and Denmark. The prospects for finding a good job in this field are excellent for the foreseeable future.

### Academic Requirements

To become a pathologists' assistant, you must graduate from an accredited baccalaureate degree program. A Master's degree is also available in this field. For a list of accredited Pathologists' Assistants (PathA) programs, see the [National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Lab Sciences \(http://www.naacls.org/\)](http://www.naacls.org/) website.

Many Pathologists' Assistants are already health professionals who have gone back for another degree. Common first careers include histotechnologists, [clinical lab technologists](#), [cytotechnologists](#), autopsy technicians and military trained medics or hospital corpsman.

Pathologists' Assistants may join the [American Association of Pathologists' Assistants \(http://www.pathologistsassistants.org/default.aspx?n=hm\)](http://www.pathologistsassistants.org/default.aspx?n=hm), which has three levels of membership: Student, Affiliate, and Fellow. To join as a student, you must be enrolled in a NAACLS-accredited program.

To become an Affiliate member of the AAPA, you must have a bachelor's degree in the field, as well as three years of continuous bench experience; at this point, you are eligible to sit for the ASCP BOR Pathologists' Assistant Certification Examination. (**Note:** *On-the-job trained practitioners also may take the exam, but this alternative will no longer be available after December 31, 2007.*) Upon passing the exam, you are elevated to AAPA Fellow status.

## Professional Associations

American Association of Pathologists' Assistants

(<http://www.pathologistsassistants.org/Default.aspx?m=1012&s=142>)

## Funding Opportunities

Search for funding opportunities in this field (<http://www.explorehealthcareers.org>)

## Enrichment Programs

Search for enrichment programs in this field (<http://www.explorehealthcareers.org>)

## Source

[www.pathologistsassistants.org](http://www.pathologistsassistants.org)

## Learn more about this field:

Allied Health Professions (<http://www.explorehealthcareers.org/en/Field.1.aspx>)

Salary: \$60,000 - \$90,000

Years in school: 4 - 6 \*

Job outlook: Excellent

\* after high school graduation

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