

The Cytotechnologist



A cytotechnologist (CT) is a laboratory specialist who is responsible for examining human cell samples under the microscope for early signs of cancer and other diseases. The cytotechnologist analyzes subtle cell changes—both nuclear and cytoplasmic—and compares these changes to normal cell findings for that body site. The cytotechnologist must be familiar with normal anatomy and histology for all the body systems and must be familiar with the disease processes that can affect these body sites. By comparing these facts with the clinical history provided for the patient, the cytotechnologist can judge the significance of the cell findings observed.

The cytotechnologist can issue the final report for certain specimens that are normal; when abnormal cells are present, the cytotechnologist works with the pathologist to arrive at a final diagnosis. Cytotechnologists work independently with little supervision. They must be patient, precise, and have relatively good eyesight. Above all, the cytotechnologist must enjoy making decisions and taking responsibility, because their correct analysis of microscopic cellular changes can directly affect a patient's course of treatment and may save the patient's life by early detection of cancer.

"I chose a career as a cytotechnologist because I have always been interested in looking at cells under the microscope. I find the work challenging and the variety of tasks interesting."

Careers
in Pathology and Medical Laboratory Science

Minimum Education Requirement: (CT)

A baccalaureate degree and completion of an accredited cytotechnologist program.

Career Preparation

To prepare for a career as a cytotechnologist, you should get a solid foundation in high school sciences — biology, chemistry, math and computer science. You'll also need a combination of formal education leading to a baccalaureate degree, plus clinical education in a 12-month cytotechnology program accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs. Preparing for a career as a histotechnologist or histotechnician is a good investment in your future. Your education in cytotechnology will prepare you directly for a job. While you're going to school, you may be able to work part time in a laboratory to earn extra money. And you could start working full time the day after you graduate.

Scholarships

Through the generous contributions of its members and support from Dade Behring, Inc., the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) offers scholarships to qualified students enrolled in approved laboratory science educational and training programs. All scholarship selection criteria include academic achievement, leadership abilities and community activities, professional goals, and endorsements from faculty and community leaders.

Certification

To be sure that laboratory workers are competent and able to perform high quality laboratory tests, the ASCP Board of Registry gives a national certification exam. Students take this exam after meeting their academic and laboratory education requirements. Those who pass the exam may use the initials CT(ASCP) after their names to show they are proficient in their field. Certification is valid for three years. To demonstrate competency throughout their careers after their initial certification, cytotechnologists must complete a Certification Maintenance Program every three years.

Job Opportunities

Today, there are more jobs for cytotechnologists than educated people to fill those jobs. The future long-term employment looks bright. The need is great everywhere throughout the country. Hospitals, for-profit laboratories, clinics, public health facilities, and industry currently have positions open for qualified cytotechnologists.

Opportunities for Specialization

A cytotechnologist with a baccalaureate degree and five years' experience, or a master's degree and four years' experience, or

a doctorate and three years' experience can qualify to take the examination to become a Specialist in Cytotechnology (SCT). These specialists are skilled in examining all types of body specimens, including needle aspirates and fine needle aspirates. Certified cytotechnologists are also qualified to take the examination to become a Technologist in Molecular Pathology (MP), a new and rapidly growing field.

Do you have what it takes?

All cytotechnologists have certain common characteristics. They are problem solvers. They like challenge and responsibility. They are accurate, reliable, work well under pressure and are able to finish a task once started. They communicate well, both in writing and speaking. They set high standards for themselves and expect quality in the work they do. Above all, they are deeply committed to their profession, and are truly fascinated by all that science has to offer. For someone who chooses a career as a cytotechnologist, the exploration never ends.

Key Contacts

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The American Society for Clinical Pathology provides excellence in education, certification, and advocacy on behalf of patients, pathologists, and laboratory professionals. Founded in 1922, ASCP is a professional society with 140,000 member pathologists and medical laboratory professionals.