

Cytotechnologist



Occupational Description

Cytology is the study of the structure and the function of cells. Cytotechnologists are specially trained technologists who work with pathologists to detect changes in cells that may be important in the early diagnosis of cancer, pre-cancer lesions, and other diseases. This is done primarily using microscopes to evaluate slide preparations of cells for abnormalities in structure, indicating either benign or malignant conditions.



Job Description

Cell specimens may be obtained from various body sites, such as the female reproductive tract, the lung, or any body cavity shedding cells. Using special techniques, slides are first prepared from these specimens. Cytotechnologists then examine the slides microscopically, mark cellular changes that are most representative of a disease process, and submit with a pathologist for final evaluation. Using the findings of cytotechnologists, the pathologist is then able, in many instances, to diagnose cancer and other diseases long before they can be detected by other methods. In recent years, fine needles have been used to aspirate lesions, often deeply seated in the body, thus greatly enhancing the ability to diagnose tumors located in otherwise inaccessible sites.



Employment Characteristics

Most cytotechnologists work in hospitals or in commercial laboratories. With experience, cytotechnologists may also work in private industry or in supervisory, research, and teaching capacities. Employment opportunities and salaries vary depending on geographic location, experience, and ability. According to the ASCT, the average hourly pay for cytotechnologists was \$26.17 in 2002 (*ASCT News*, Volume V, No. 1, 2002).



Educational Programs

Length. The length of the program depends significantly on its organizational structure. In general, after completion of the prerequisite course work, at least 1 calendar year of structured professional instruction in cytotechnology is necessary to achieve program objectives and to establish entry-level competencies.

Prerequisites. Applicants should be well grounded in the biological sciences and in basic chemistry. This entails successful

completion of at least 20 semester hours (30 quarter hours) in the biological sciences and chemistry courses equaling or exceeding 8 semester hours (12 quarter hours). In addition, applicants are also required to have a baccalaureate degree in order to qualify for the national certification exam.

Curriculum. The curriculum includes the principles of cytopreparation of cell samples, cytologic evaluation of cell samples from all body sites, introduction to principles of management, research, and education as they apply to the cytology laboratory, and cytology as applied in clinical medicine. Upon completion, graduates will possess the technical skills to evaluate a wide variety of cytologic preparations and have a basic knowledge of contemporary procedures and technologies used in cytopathology.



Inquiries

Careers/Curriculum

American Society of Cytopathology
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Certification/Registration

ASCP Board of Registry
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Program Accreditation

Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) in collaboration with:
Cytotechnology Programs Review Committee
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