



A CAREER IN ANATOMICAL PATHOLOGY TECHNOLOGY

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Anatomical Pathology Technologists carry out a range of tasks related to mortuary service work. One of the primary tasks is to assist and support Pathologists conducting post-mortem (PM) examinations. Anatomical Pathology Technologists can be based in an NHS Hospital Mortuary or a Local Authority Public Mortuary.

The AAPT recommend that a student of anatomical pathology technology is educated to at least 5 passes at G.C.S.E (or Scottish equivalent) level grade A-C, to include English, Maths and a Science (preferably Biology). The starting salary is approximately £14,500 and jobs are advertised either in the local or national press, NHS Careers or www.aaptuk.org. There is no discrimination against sex, height or weight.

As an Anatomical Pathology Technologist, the extent of involvement during the PM examination varies depending on experience. A student of anatomical pathology technology would only be expected to carry out certain tasks and would begin by observing mortuary work and PM examination. You would also attend mandatory training in: manual handling, infection control and health and safety.

You would also be expected to attend a RIPH (Royal Institute of Public Health) approved training course. The course is usually on half-day a week basis, but some areas offer two week residential courses.

The areas covered include:

- Anatomy and Physiology
- Post Mortem examination techniques
- Hazards to Health
- Medico-Legal legislation and codes of practice
- Administration and visitors to the post-mortem room

Ultimately, the role of a qualified Anatomical Pathology Technologist is to assist the Pathologist in all aspects of the PM and this includes practical involvement in:

- Evisceration (removal by dissection) of internal organs
- Taking and recording samples for toxicology or histopathological analysis
- Weighing organs as directed by the Pathologist
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- Performing special techniques, i.e. spinal cord removal, exposure of vertebral arteries, etc
- Reconstruction of the body
- Ensuring that a high standard of presentation of the body is made after the PM, to enable bereaved relatives to view
- Assisting forensic pathologists with examinations on homicide victims. This is a specialist area and an Anatomical Pathology Technologist carrying out this work must have a high level of experience in all aspects of forensic procedure in the PM room

In addition to supporting the Pathologist during PM examinations, Anatomical Pathology Technologists are responsible for the everyday running and maintenance of the mortuary service and autopsy room. This includes receiving sudden deaths from the community, i.e., road traffic accidents, suicides, and forensic or suspicious death cases.



The deceased are placed into a controlled refrigerated chamber to reduce the rate of decomposition. Throughout this procedure, an Anatomical Pathology Technologist is responsible for:

- Ensuring that accurate identification is recorded
- Liaison with HM Coroner officers or Procurator Fiscal, Police, Relatives, Medical and Nursing staff and Funeral Directors, or any other person or group who requires information about the deceased.

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There is a great deal of involvement with bereaved relatives and this includes:

- Conducting viewings in mortuary quiet room/s, specifically designed for this purpose
- Providing information support in respect of documentation required such as Death Certificates, Cremation forms, etc
- Offering advice on any questions the relatives may ask regarding funeral arrangements, Medico Legal issues, etc
- Assisting and advising junior doctors in obtaining signed consent for a post-mortem from the family, if HM Coroner or Procurator Fiscal does not require an examination. *Note: A hospital signed consent is obtained so that specific questions the doctors may have regarding treatment can be addressed through autopsy. Many of these types of examinations are limited to the area of interest, therefore certain organs such as the brain, may not be examined.*

Administration and clerical duties are a large part also of the daily routine, so it is essential that a good knowledge of IT and experience of working with computers is required for any person interested working in mortuary services.

Many mortuary services contribute to the training of other Health Care Professionals. Junior Doctors, Nurses, Medical Students, Paramedics, and Porter services, all receive training to make them aware of procedures and practices adopted in the mortuary environment.

The working hours vary, but generally an Anatomical Pathology Technologist will work a 37 to 40 hour week with additional overtime and on-call work included, depending on local service requirement.

The mortuary itself is divided into areas that include:

Clinical

- Body Storage/release area
- Main post-mortem suite
- Forensic/High Risk post-mortem suite (if applicable to the service)
- Paediatric post-mortem suite (if applicable to the service)

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Administration area

- Pathologist's office
- General office
- Manager's office
- Rest room

Relative's area

- Waiting room
- Viewing area

Depending on the workload of the mortuary services, the size and number of rooms may vary.



A good understanding of Health & Safety issues regarding mortuary work is required. Part of the training will involve areas such as COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health), manual handling, and infection control. Anatomical Pathology Technologists may also be required to assist at high risk examinations (people who have died from infectious disease).

Full safety clothing is worn during post mortem examinations. This includes: theatre scrub suit, visor, gloves, aprons, and boots. During high risk examinations, the protective clothing may also include respirators.

It should be stressed that many people would find this work both distressing and unpleasant. The Anatomical Pathology Technologist, however, must be able to deal with all of these in a professional and sensitive manner.

To work as an Anatomical Pathology Technologist you should have:

- Tact and sensitivity for dealing with bereaved relatives
- Good verbal communication skills and a pleasant and courteous telephone manner
- Good physical fitness

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- Knowledge of Science and Anatomy & Physiology
- Good practical skills
- The ability to carry out administration and computer work
- The ability to work as part of a small team

As a trainee, you would begin by observing mortuary work and PM examinations for a short period of time. After this period, you would work under the supervision of the Pathologist and experienced staff, and assist at the examination itself.

You would also attend mandatory training in, manual handling, infection control, and health & safety during which you are required to perform various practical assessments



Who has provided this information?

Formed in 2003, the AAPT represents Anatomical Pathology Technologists who work in both hospital and public mortuaries and is acknowledged as the guiding body to represent the profession.

There is a Student grade available to those who are employed as trainees. Please visit www.aaptuk.org for more information.