



HEALTH CAREER CONNECTION

SEPTEMBER, 2026

HEALTH CAREER SPOTLIGHT

FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST

The **forensic pathologist** is a specialist in pathology who examines persons who die suddenly, unexpectedly or violently. They are experts in determining cause and manner of death and trained in multiple forensic sciences as well as traditional medicine. They must have working knowledge of toxicology, firearms examination (wound ballistics), trace evidence, forensic serology and DNA technology. Forensic pathologists are employed by states, counties, groups of counties, or cities, as well as by medical schools, military services, and federal government. In some settings they may work for a private group or hospital which contracts with the county to perform forensic autopsies.



“The most rewarding part of the job is being able to help families find answers when a loved one has died.”

-Katherine Maloney

Forensic Medicine | AAW: \$219,000 to \$352,000 | Legal Medicine

JOB DUTIES

- ✓ Determine identity of the deceased, time of death, and manner and cause of death.
- ✓ Evaluate historical and law enforcement investigative information.
- ✓ Collect medical evidence.
- ✓ Perform autopsies.
- ✓ Case coordinate medical and forensic scientific assessment of death.
- ✓ Oversee procedures and evidence collection techniques.
- ✓ Correlate history, autopsy results and laboratory tests to draw conclusions to the cause and manner of death.
- ✓ Prepare report summarizing findings.
- ✓ Testify before courts and other tribunals as needed.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Attend college to obtain a bachelor's degree (4 years).

Attend medical school earning an M.D. or D.O. degree (4 years).

Following med school a few options available:

(1) Three years in anatomic pathology (hospital pathology) followed by one year in forensic pathology. (2) Anatomic pathology, clinical pathology (laboratory medicine) and forensic pathology (5 years) (3) anatomic pathology (2-years), forensic pathology (1 yr) and one year of neuropathology, toxicology or related field.

Complete Residency: Involves practical (on-the-job) experience supervised by trained forensic pathologists.

Become Certified: Pass American Board of Pathology exam certifying special competence in forensic pathology.

Click on the image for Forensic Pathology career info



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urS6uMfIS4c&t=328s>



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CAREER CLOSE-UP

Katherine Maloney, Deputy Chief Medical Examiner at Erie County (NY) Health, shares her professional insights and experience in forensic pathology.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

"The most rewarding part of the job is being able to help families find answers when a loved one has died. The deaths investigated by the medical examiner's office are usually unexpected deaths, so often the family does not know why their loved one has died. Being able to find the reason a person died and help the family understand is a critical part of what we do. It is not only the deceased person that is our patient, but their entire family. Forensic pathologists are often called, "the physician of the bereaved," and that is a very apt title."

What is the most challenging?

"The most challenging part of the job is when answers cannot be found. Sometimes the cause of death cannot be determined for a variety of reasons, which is frustrating for the family and the forensic pathologist. With advances in science, like expanded genetic testing, we are able to find the answers to more deaths than in the past, but still there are causes of deaths that elude us."

What advice would you give to someone starting out in this field?

"The most difficult part of any medical specialty is getting into medical school in the first place. Focus your efforts on getting good grades in college and practice taking examinations so you can get a competitive score on the entrance exam. Once you are in medical school, everything you learn is relevant to pathology (the study of disease) and forensic pathology. More than that, a good understanding of human nature and why people do the things that they do will serve you well."

Anything else you want to share?

"The road is long, as there is college, medical school, residency, and fellowship training, but the rewards are high."



RESOURCES



For more information on Forensic Pathology visit

<https://www.cap.org/article/what-you-need-to-know-about-forensic-pathology/>



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