

Cytopathology in focus: Master's for all—unifying training in cytotechnology

Janie Roberson, SCT(ASCP)^{CM}

Jennifer A. Brainard, MD

August 2019—Cytology practice is shifting from fewer gynecologic screening tests to a greater focus on diagnostic testing in nongynecologic cytology including fine-needle aspiration. Roles of cytotechnologists have been changing in the workplace to help laboratories meet new demands and act as pathologist extenders. In many laboratories, cytotechnologists add efficiencies to pathology practice through their active roles in rapid on-site evaluation and preliminary evaluation of special stains and FISH testing. Other ways cytotechnologists facilitate pathology practice were highlighted in the January 2019 issue of CAP TODAY in “Cytopathology in focus” (“[Next-generation cytotechnology: new cytotechnologist roles](#)”).

One important function of the Cytotechnology Program Review Committee, a multi-sponsored organization dedicated to cytotechnology education, is to take the pulse of current employer needs through annual employer and graduate surveys as well as interactions with sponsoring societies. Based on feedback from these communities of interest, competencies required of newly graduated cytotechnologists entering the workforce (ELCs) change and training is modified. With the trend toward increasingly complex diagnostics and the time required for teaching, and with a view to enhancing opportunities for cytotechnologists in the workplace, cytotechnologist training was reevaluated. After thorough consideration and discussion with communities of interest, a decision was made to unify training in cytotechnology and move to a master's degree profession for all. Currently, there are three pathways that lead to certification as a cytotechnologist (certificate program, BS degree program, master's program). This move to the master's degree for all programs is aligned with other allied health professions and aims to keep cytotechnologists at a degree level warranted by the work required. Currently, six of 21 active programs offer a master's degree.

Survey of cytotechnology program directors

Over the past three years, how is salary overall trending?

Up:	13 (81.25 percent)
Stable:	3 (18.75 percent)
Down:	0

What is the average hourly wage?

Range \$28–\$43 per hour with higher wages in large metropolitan areas

Are other incentives offered?

Sign-on bonus:	12 (75 percent); range \$1,000–\$10,000
Moving expenses:	10 (62.5 percent)
Tuition reimbursement:	6 (37.5 percent)

How do you perceive job market trends over the past three years?

Improving:	14 (87.5 percent)
Stable:	2 (12.5 percent)
Declining:	0

How do you perceive the stability of your program?

Stable:	15 (93.75 percent)
At risk:	1 (6.25 percent)

What are the greatest challenges facing your program?

Financial challenge
Move to master's degree
Recruitment of students
Molecular training
Clinical affiliations

Cytotechnologists account for a small proportion of laboratory professions, and subtle changes in the workforce may be obscured in the large laboratory data pool. While published vacancy rates remain low (Garcia E, et al. *Am J Clin Pathol*. 2018;149[5]:387–400), program directors are reporting improved job placement and increasing salaries. Select members of the CAP Cytopathology Committee surveyed cytotechnology program directors to gather additional information about employment trends. Of the 21 directors of active cytopathology programs, 16

responded to the survey (76 percent response rate). The respondents represent a diverse group of programs in states distributed across the country as well as Puerto Rico. See the box on page 46 for a summary of the survey questions and responses.

This survey data offers a snapshot of the current job opportunities for cytotechnologists. The data is positive for salaries and open positions, which translates to opportunities for cytotechnologists. The majority of programs reported stability but faced similar challenges, especially in maintaining the finances required to support the school as well as the transition to the master's degree. As a pathology community that needs skilled cytotechnologists in the workplace, supporting schools and helping overcome these challenges will be of paramount importance in the coming years.

Janie Roberson, a member of the CAP Cytopathology Committee, is senior director of anatomic pathology, quality, and cellular therapy, University of Alabama at Birmingham. Dr. Brainard, vice chair of the committee, is vice chair of cytology operations, Cleveland Clinic.