

The Overview of the Practice of a Licensed Pathologists' Assistant in New York State

<https://www.op.nysed.gov/professions/pathologists-assistant/professional-practice>

Licensed pathologists' assistants provide services under the direction and supervision of a licensed physician who practices anatomic pathology. Services include, but are not limited to:

- Preparing gross tissue sections for pathology analysis which includes but is not limited to cutting, staining (as required), describing gross anatomic features, dissecting and processing surgical specimens for bio-banking, histologic processing, or other analyses (e.g. frozen section); and
- Performing human postmortem examinations which includes but is not limited to selection of tissues and fluids for further examination, external examination, dissection, and gathering and recording information for autopsy reports.

Licensed pathologists' assistants do not diagnose or provide a medical opinion. Services of a licensed pathologists' assistant must be performed in a laboratory or other site authorized under law to perform such services.

As a newly licensed profession, some have inquired as to the basic knowledge and skills that should be held by a New York State licensed pathologist's assistant. The following outlines the essential competencies that should be expected of newly hired pathologists' assistants.

A. Fundamentals of Pathology

- Recognize how different disease processes present in anatomic specimens
- Understand systematic anatomic approaches to handling, sampling and when applicable, staging of neoplastic disease processes
- Understand the importance of proper specimen fixation and know different type of fixatives that are available and their application
- Understand types of testing for anatomic specimens and their associated handling (i.e. fresh tissue vs. fixed tissue including but not limited to the submission for flow cytometry, EM, IF, etc.)
- Understand systematic approaches for specimen description and sampling
- Recognize simple versus complex surgical specimens and their different handling requirements
- Understand pre-analytical factors that can compromise pathologic diagnoses

B. Surgical Pathology

- Identify specimen types, normal anatomic structures, variant anatomic structures and pathological changes for orientation, sampling, staging, and margin assessment
- Understand and perform frozen section procedures under the guidance and supervision of the pathologist

C. Autopsy Pathology

- Understand the difference between clinical versus forensic autopsy
- Understand different evisceration and dissection techniques and their applications
- Understand the chain of custody requirements of the deceased/remains
- Understand proper autopsy techniques to prevent postmortem damage that might compromise investigations and/or limit funerary viewing

D. Laboratory Operations

- Understand the principles of a Total Quality Assurance Program
- Understand the importance of general laboratory safety and general laboratory practices (e.g. personal protective device, safety data sheets, proper patient identifiers, accurate specimen identification)