

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT DEAD BODIES



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When you think of pathology what comes to mind? If you think about mortuaries and solving crimes you're not alone. Research has shown that most people learn about pathology from the television, where programmes such as *Silent Witness* and *CSI* give a rather unrealistic view of the specialty. The reality of pathology in modern healthcare is very different.

MULTIPLE DISCIPLINES

There are eighteen different disciplines within pathology, the largest being cellular pathology (the study of disease by studying tissue microscopically), haematology (the study of diseases of the blood), chemical pathology (the study of chemicals in the blood and other body fluids) and medical microbiology (the study of infections). Smaller disciplines include immunology, toxicology, clinical embryology and genetics.

The pathologists most commonly portrayed on television, forensic pathologists, make up less than 1% of the specialty.

WORKING FOR THE LIVING

Far from being doctors to the dead, the vast majority of pathologists work for the benefit of the living. If you've ever had a blood test, a cervical smear, a biopsy or allergy test, you have been cared for by a pathologist. As well as working in laboratories, pathologists work on hospital wards and in outpatient clinics. Pathologists are core members of the multidisciplinary teams of healthcare professionals who care for every cancer patient, contributing information about diagnosis, prognosis and the effect of treatment. Far from being the isolated, repetitive job sometimes portrayed, pathology is a dynamic and exciting specialty, full of professionals who care deeply about providing high quality healthcare.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

In November 2008 the Royal College of Pathologists organised the first National Pathology Week, giving everyone working in the specialty the opportunity to raise awareness of the role of pathology in modern medicine. Over 70% of diagnoses made in the NHS involve pathology, making it a vital part of almost everyone's healthcare experience. Over three hundred events were held during National Pathology Week in hospitals and communities around the country.

NATIONAL PATHOLOGY WEEK 2008 EVENTS

Events included interactive workshops, scenario events, presentations to trust Boards, school visits, photographic and art competitions, quizzes, laboratory tours and open days, stands in shopping centres and even a pathology bus. Events were targeted at a wide range of audiences including school students from Key Stage 2 to 5, medical and other university science students, the general public including families, healthcare professionals, MPs and other policy makers. National Pathology Week was launched at an event at the House of Commons, where MPs had the opportunity to talk to pathologists about the contribution of the specialty to healthcare, focusing on current topics including cancer screening programmes, point of care testing and the treatment of long term conditions.

FEEDBACK

Evaluation was a key part of National Pathology Week and was very positive, with almost everyone who attended an event being keen to attend another one. Encouragingly, half the people who attended events had not attended anything similar before, which means that National Pathology Week helped introduce thousands of people to science and pathology. It wasn't just members of the audience who found National Pathology Week educational and fun, event organisers also benefited from the experience.

Plenty of constructive feedback was also received. Audiences wanted more opportunity to talk to pathologists, so informal question and answer sessions have been incorporated into subsequent events. Audiences also asked for full day events, which require catering facilities and a time commitment that most pathology departments cannot provide. We have addressed this by working more closely with science centres, integrating pathology into established public engagement programmes.

Some of the comments made following National Pathology Week 2008:

"The most useful thing was having real scientists to talk to"
GCSE student

"I learnt that pathologists find ways to improve people's lives"
A level student

"I really enjoyed the experience and found it very motivating"
Event organiser

"I've learned more today than I have in the last year"
GCSE student

"Absolutely fascinating – a great event showing the NHS at its best and clearly demonstrating value for money."
Member of public

"It's not like it is on the telly!"
Member of public

TEAM WORKING

National Pathology Week provided a great opportunity for all those working in the specialty to get together to develop and deliver an event. There are

several different professional groups working in pathology, including medically-qualified pathologists, clinical and biomedical scientists, laboratory and mortuary technicians, cytology screeners and administrative staff. National Pathology Week was a great team-building exercise, allowing colleagues who had perhaps never worked together to join forces to promote their specialty. Several pathologists even commented that organising an event had reignited their passion for the subject. Trainees in all professional groups were particularly enthusiastic and were popular with younger audiences.

NATIONAL PATHOLOGY WEEK 2009

The second National Pathology Week is being held from 2nd to 8th November this year. Over three hundred events are being organised around the country. This year the theme is *Pathology: the heart of modern healthcare*, focusing on the central role of all pathology disciplines in the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of all types of heart disease. For example, chemical pathologists will highlight their role in the interpretation of cholesterol and heart enzyme levels, haematologists will explore their role in treating blood clotting disorders, microbiologists will demonstrate the diagnosis of infections that affect the heart, immunologists will look at the pathology behind heart transplantation, geneticists will reveal how some heart disease is inherited, and paediatric pathologists will explain their role in the diagnosis of congenital heart disease. All of this will be presented in the context of the busy, modern NHS pathology service, with expert pathologists and scientists giving up their own time to

share their passion for patient care through the science of pathology.

COLLABORATION

Pathology is all about teamwork, and National Pathology Week is no different. In 2008 The Royal College of Pathologists worked with other specialist societies including the Association for Clinical Biochemistry and the Pathological Society to develop successful public engagement events. Links with specialist societies are even closer this year, with representatives of the larger societies being core members of the central co-ordinating team. The team also includes representatives from each of the College's eleven regions, ensuring that pathology professionals around the country have access to local support and information.

This year, the College is working with the British Heart Foundation to promote heart health and healthy lifestyles. The Royal College of Pathologists has also developed links with science centres around the country and events are planned in collaboration with the Science Museum in London, W5 Science Centre in Belfast, Thinktank Science Museum in Birmingham, the Thackray Museum in Leeds, Sensation Science centre in Dundee, Glasgow Science centre, the Centre of the Cell in London and The Centre for Life in Newcastle. Joint events are also being held with the Royal College of Surgeons, the Royal Geographical Society, the Wellcome Collection and the Royal Institution. By working with such a diverse group of partners the College hopes to take pathology to a wide audience who might otherwise not have the opportunity to discover the fascinating science behind so many familiar medical tests and procedures.



Object handling at a virtual autopsy event held at the Royal College of Surgeons during National Pathology Week 2008, one of over 300 public events held throughout the country.

PATHOLOGY ALL YEAR ROUND

Furthering public understanding of pathology is one of the key aims of the Royal College of Pathologists and National Pathology Week is just one part of the public engagement programme of the College. Pathologists around the country visit schools and communities all year round and the College is developing an outreach project to provide resources for those involved in these events. Many pathologists have taken advantage of science communication training, developed by the College in collaboration with the Science Museum. Participants have learnt how to plan events to meet the needs of different audiences. Many members of the College are also STEMNET Science and Engineering Ambassadors, part of a nationwide network of trained science communicators.

NATIONAL PATHOLOGY WEEK WEBSITE

There is a dedicated National Pathology Week website (www.nationalpathologyweek.org) with information and resources for members of the public, those considering a career in pathology and pathologists and scientists who would like to

develop a public engagement event. There are glossaries, frequently asked questions and links to websites where further information can be found. For event organisers there are downloadable posters, handouts, presentations, event templates and tips on how to organise and publicise an event.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Everyone can get involved in promoting science in general and pathology in particular. There is a programme of events taking place during National Pathology Week on the website, so have a look and see if there's anything near you. If you're involved in health policy-making, this is an ideal opportunity to find out first hand what happens in a pathology department and how important the specialty is to patient care. If you're part of an organisation with a public engagement role, could you work with us to reach an even wider audience?

I'd also like to thank our sponsors Siemens for their continued support.

For more information about National Pathology Week visit www.nationalpathologyweek.org or contact me.

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