FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – 2017

Program: GENERAL PATHOLOGY

Specialty/Field Questions:

1. a) What are some strengths about your specialty? What draws and keeps people in your specialty?
   • *The opportunity to understand the nature of disease in an in-depth way that isn’t achieved in any other specialty. You get to practice scientific diagnostic medicine over a broad range of subjects and you have a fair degree of control over your schedule.*

   b) What are some common complaints about your specialty?
      • *There is limited direct clinical contact – you’ll never have an office full of patients who regard you as their doctor and most pathologists have a hospital-based practice which can limit professional autonomy.*

2. Why did you choose your specialty?
   • *Opportunity to have an academic career that readily incorporates teaching, research, and clinical pathology with a good balance between work and life.*

3. What types of clinical cases do you commonly see?
   • *The entire gamut of clinical problems has a counterpart in pathology. You can practice as a subspecialist or as a generalist depending on your interest and on the environment.*

4. Briefly describe a typical day.
   • *Depends upon the setting. Most pathologists are much involved in clinical rounds, laboratory supervision, and direct diagnostic work in biopsies, surgical pathology, hematology, etc. Academics do academic things; community-based pathologists often have major roles in their institutions/medical staff organizations. Very little evening and weekend call in most settings. Call always taken from home and usually the problems can be solved over the phone or by a brief hospital visit.*

5. a) What are the varieties of lifestyles within your field?
    • *The lifestyle in pathology is hard to beat. It is possible to do pathology and do it well and still have a life outside medicine. Most pathologists work regular office hours and work quite hard during the day. They do not haunt the hospitals at night!*

    b) Specifically, how able is your specialty to accommodate family life?
      • *Very easily. Working hours are very regular for pathologists and call work is minimal. In pathology, one can achieve a very satisfactory work – life balance that is ideal for raising a family.*

6. Range of incomes?
   • *In Alberta, pathologists are paid by salary on a standard grid, depending on experience. Pathologists generally have no or minimal overhead.*
7. How do you see your discipline changing over the next decade?
   - While histo/cytomorphology will remain the mainstay of diagnosis, there will be increasing usage of molecular techniques for both diagnosis, prognostic determination and treatment responses. These will be exciting changes.

**Residency Program Questions:**

8. a) What are you specifically looking for in an impressive candidate?
   - Someone who is hard-working, self-motivated, and passionate about understanding the nature of disease. Someone who is a team-player, and has excellent communication skills.

   b) What can a potential candidate do now, in order to be an appealing applicant to your program?
   - Acquire a sound foundation of medical knowledge, develop excellent communication skills both with patients and other medical colleagues, and explore other specialty areas to ensure that pathology is the right choice for you. Research activities are strongly encouraged.

9. How is your residency program organized? (i.e. year by year breakdown and schedule of rotations)
   - First year is a rotating clinical year.
   - Second year residents will spend an initial six months in Anatomical Pathology and then leave to do two of the clinical medicine specialties in Hematopathology, Medical Biochemistry and Medical Microbiology.
   - Third year residents will spend a total of nine months in Anatomical Pathology and three months in the third of the clinical specialties not covered in the first year. During the second rotation in Anatomical Pathology, the resident will have exposure to the subspecialty areas, principally cytopathology and neuropathology.
   - Fourth year residents will spend three months in two of the clinical pathology areas and six months in Anatomical Pathology. The rotations in the clinical pathology specialties are designed to reinforce earlier training in these areas and to enhance it. The training in Anatomical Pathology at this time will include subspecialty rotations including a period at the Chief Medical Examiner’s Office, and a senior rotation with supervision of junior residents.
   - Fifth year residents will spend three months in Anatomical Pathology, three months in the third of the clinical specialties (that which was not covered in the preceding year) and six months in General Pathology. The period in Anatomical Pathology may be spent at the University of Alberta Hospital or the Royal Alexandra Hospital. The resident will spend the remaining four to six months of their training at Dynalife or community-based hospitals.

10. What is your residency program’s orientation and focus?
    - To produce top-quality diagnostic pathologists who are passionate about what they do. This is done by ensuring exposure to a large volume of cases, exposure to teaching and research opportunities and a full range or practice patterns in a collegial and collaborative environment. We are able to support the development of both academic pathologists and hospital/community based pathologists in this program.
11. What is the availability of experiences in subspecialty areas during training?
- There is built in time to experience all the subspecialties of pathology from pediatrics to molecular pathology. In addition, there are 8 weeks of elective time that can be used to pursue subspecialty training.

12. Are there sufficient elective opportunities during training to explore your special interests?
- Yes – 8 weeks are set aside to use in order to steer your career in the direction you want.

13. What is the on-call schedule during each year of residency?
- First year is as per your clinical rotation.
- Second – fifth year residents cover UAH surgical pathology call for one week at a time, approximately every ten weeks. It is home call, and a resident is called about three times/week with very rare occasion to return to the hospital.

14. What distinguishes the U of A program from other programs?
- The greatest strengths of the program include huge volume of cases and excellent teaching with ever-expanding opportunities for research and teaching. The U of A department is strong in all laboratory disciplines and able to mount strong specific programs in anatomical pathology. Success rates on the first attempt at the FRCPC examinations are very high.

15. a) Who can we contact for more information or to set up electives?
- Our program administrator, Ms. Kathryn Tomlinson. She can be reached by email at kathryn.tomlinson@ualberta.ca.

b) Specifically, is there a list of residents whom we can call or email?
- Yes – please contact Ms. Tomlinson for contact information.

16. How competitive is it to get in, and then to succeed in your field?
- Almost all students who want pathology as their first choice will be matched in the first round; most will also get their first choice location. There is a critical shortage of pathologists across Canada and the U.S. You should have no difficulty in securing a residency position and succeeding in the FRCPC examinations.

17. a) Is there active and/or required research in your residency program?
- A component of research is required. Residents must present their research at our annual research day at least twice during their residency.

b) What role does research play in your career?
- Research is present in varying degrees among pathologists. Our research strengths include a world-renowned renal and transplantation pathology research program. Some are 75% research, 25% clinical practice, while others do no research at all. It is pathologist dependent.

18. What local, national or international conferences would be of benefit to candidates interested in your residency program?
- The annual Banff course on subspecialty pathology, the Canadian Association of Pathologists (CAP) annual meeting and the United States and Canada Association of Pathologists’ (USCAP) meeting are all regularly attended by residents and pathologists.