FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – 2018

Program: ANATOMICAL 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?
   - Anatomical pathology, by definition, encompasses the entire medical spectrum. Think of any disease process, from pediatrics to geriatrics, neurosurgery to dermatology, pathologists diagnose diseases in all organs.

4. Briefly describe a typical day.
   - Depends upon the setting. Most pathologists are involved in clinicopathologic rounds, laboratory supervision, and direct diagnostic work in biopsies, surgical pathology, hematology, etc. Academic pathologists teach students and residents, and may have dedicated time for research in addition to their clinical sign out duties; community-based pathologists usually sign out cases for the majority of their time, but often have major administrative roles in their institutions/medical staff organizations. Some community hospitals also train residents, and the pathologists will be involved in teaching. There is very little to no evening/weekend call in most settings. Call always taken from home and usually problems can be solved over the phone or by a brief hospital visit, typically for a frozen section.

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 hard during the day, but do not haunt the hospital halls at night! Working hours are often flexible in many settings, as non-urgent cases do not complain about having to wait a few hours, unlike a waiting room full of patients!

   b) Specifically, how able is your specialty to accommodate family life?
- Very easily. Working hours are very regular for pathologists and call duties are 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 receive a fixed income according to a standard contracted grid determined by experience. Starting incomes are very competitive compared to other non-surgical specialties. Pathologists generally have no or minimal overhead and do not deal with hassles of billing.

7. How do you see your discipline changing over the next decade?
- While histo/cytomorphology will remain the mainstay of diagnosis, there is also increasing usage of molecular techniques for diagnosis, prognostic determination and treatment responses. These are exciting changes, particularly as new tests are developed and brought into daily practice.

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. It is also important to have strong clinical knowledge which serves as a basis for everything we do in pathology.

   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. Doing a pathology elective at any institution in North America is a must and research is strongly encouraged.

9. How is your residency program organized? (i.e. year by year breakdown and schedule of rotations)
   - Please note that the exact program structure is under revision as CBD is introduced by Royal College for residents starting in 2019, but the general 5-year structure is anticipated to remain in place.
   - First year is a rotating clinical year.
   - Second year is mostly spent on general surgical pathology and autopsy rotations at all the hospital sites, focusing on learning the basics of anatomical pathology including autopsy, grossing and microscopy.
   - Third – fifth years have progressively increased responsibility, with further enhanced focus on surgical pathology in the hospitals across the city, including numerous subspecialty rotations such as cytopathology, forensics, pediatrics, neuropathology, breast, genitorurinary, gynecologic athology, lymphoma, and molecular pathology.

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 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 11 blocks 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 – several months are available to use in order to steer your career in the direction you want. Electives at other institutions outside Edmonton are encouraged.

13. What is the on-call schedule during each year of residency?
   - Clinical rotations: determined by the clinical service.
   - Pathology rotations: residents cover UAH surgical pathology after-hours 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 go to the hospital, typically for a frozen section. Residents rotating at UAH also cover daytime call to triage “rush” specimen requests or inquiries from clinicians, which typically comprises one or 2 phone calls a day.

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.

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 an ongoing 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 research project is required, and must be presented at an intradepartmental or external scientific meeting.

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