



SPECIAL REPORT

Perspectives on expanded scope of practice in cytotechnology

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Introduction In an effort to identify professional trends while offering meaningful resources to support decision making in the cytopathology community, the ASC/ASCP Workgroup: Focusing on Emerging Roles in Cytopathology conducted several data collection activities to assess the current state and professional trends of cytotechnologist (CT) practice. This information is intended to inform evidence-based development of education and workforce model(s).

Materials and methods Research was conducted through mixed-method data collection processes. These included the ASCP Board of Certification (BOC) Practice Analysis, focus groups used to gather qualitative data regarding the perceptions and experiences of current stakeholders in cytopathology through face-to-face discussion, and a RAND Delphi study conducted to gather qualitative data regarding the perspectives and “pulse” of decision makers influencing cytopathology practice.

Results Research findings reveal that practice patterns with new and emerging technologies are changing the workplace for many cytotechnologists. Cytotechnologists are increasingly performing tasks within the laboratory that extend beyond their formal training and are looking to professional societies to bridge the gap. Although many laboratory leaders embrace the use of cytotechnologists in expanded roles, regulatory restrictions and reimbursement rules are among acknowledged barriers to change.

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Friedlander and Pineault contributed equally to this work, they are considered as co-first authors.

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Conclusions This study examines current marketplace needs and cytotechnologists' perceptions of their evolving workplace demands through qualitative data collection. This study provides a snapshot of the current climate of cytopathology and data that will help direct future education, personnel training needs, and staffing decisions.

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Introduction

Since its inception, the profession of cytotechnology has progressed beyond the traditional roles of cytopreparation and Papanicolaou test screening. The evolution of Papanicolaou test collection from a manually smeared sample on a slide to automated thin layer technology, changes in cervical cancer screening guidelines, increased utilization of fine-needle aspiration (FNA) and the resulting demand for rapid onsite evaluation (ROSE) of specimen adequacy have all impacted the role of cytotechnologists (CTs). CTs have adapted to these shifts in practice, technological advances, and the changing needs of the cytopathologists they support. At the same time, progress in technologies like telepathology and molecular testing will continue to influence cytotechnology practice.

With change comes ambiguity, and CTs have struggled with the trajectory of cytology's future for almost two decades.¹ Many strategies have been implemented and proposed to help CTs meet the changing needs of today while anticipating the needs of the future. Entry level competencies are periodically updated to meet expressed employer needs.^{2,3} Development of certificate courses for advanced training and a new doctoral degree all have been suggested and explored.

One concept of growing interest has been the development of an advanced practitioner for cytotechnology, often referred to as a *cytopathology practitioner* (CP) or *mid-level pathology*

practitioner (MLPP). First discussed in 2005 and appealing as a potential career path for CTs, this practitioner would capitalize on the fundamental and somewhat unique skills of the CT-microscopic morphologic identification and depth of understanding of benign and neoplastic disease processes, while also encompassing more nontraditional tasks, expanding the scope of practice for these professionals.

These strategies hold promise for cytotechnologists while also presenting their own unique challenges for implementation. In addition, concrete data on market demand and cost-benefit evaluation are lacking, creating a stumbling block in progressing in this direction.

In an effort to identify professional trends while offering meaningful resources to support decision making in the cytopathology community, the American Society for Cytopathology (ASC) and the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) created the ASC/ASCP Workgroup: Focusing on Emerging Roles in Cytopathology. Developed in 2014, the workgroup charges include developing concrete goals to address evolving practice changes while ensuring education, practice, and trending data support the cytotechnology profession's longevity and livelihood.

To this end, the ASC/ASCP Workgroup initiated several data collection activities to assess the current state of CT practice and professional trends. This information is intended to inform the development of education and workforce model(s) from evidence-based recommendations and strategies to support current and future practitioners.

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