



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

The Royal College of Pathologists' health priorities for the next government

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Pathologists are doctors and scientists who examine samples of tissue and body fluids from patients in order to reach a diagnosis. Many of our members treat serious disease. They also play a critical role in education and research, and devise new treatments to fight infections and diseases like cancer and diabetes.

Pathologists are essential to diagnosis and treatment to improve patient care. The work of pathologists supports patients throughout their entire life. Without pathologists we cannot understand what is making a patient unwell. In this priorities document we look at the key challenges facing pathologists and call on the next government to address these areas.

Investing in workforce for patients

- Safe and effective high-quality patient care relies on the right number of skilled health staff in the right places. Pathology staffing numbers have not risen in line with demand and pathology services are unable to recruit to vacant posts.
- As just one example of these shortages, the College census of the histopathology workforce, *Meeting Pathology Demand*,¹ showed that only 3% of NHS histopathology departments across the UK had enough staff to meet clinical demand.

The College's call for the next government:

- The College calls for increased investment in pathology services, particularly in the recruitment and training of pathologists and scientists. More funded training places are needed.

- Since the launch of our histopathology workforce report, a pay premium has been introduced for new histopathology trainees in England. We are now calling for the recruitment and retention premium to be extended to all, including specialist histopathology trainees in areas in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

IT and infrastructure for better patient care

- Pathologists need better IT for day-to-day work including modern, functional laboratory information systems, voice recognition support and remote working software for multidisciplinary teams. A third of Laboratory Information Management Systems (LIMS) are over 30 years old. These are vital in pathology services to effectively manage requests for diagnostic tests, samples and reports to guide treatment and plan further investigations.
- Digital pathology – the collection, management, sharing and interpretation of pathology information in a digital environment – will improve patient care, and support the pathology workforce by making the diagnosis and monitoring of disease much more efficient. It will bring faster and easier access to expert opinion and advice, with the rapid referral of cases between pathology networks or between organisations.

The College's call for the next government:

- We welcome the recently announced investment in some Laboratory Information Management systems. However, to transform pathology services and support patient care and safety, we need further investment in IT infrastructure, staffing and training.
- Further capital investment is needed to fully roll out digital pathology, so staff can work more efficiently and flexibly.

Genomic testing

- The College believes genomics has huge potential to improve patient care, but there must be a proper regulatory regime, and a sensible and practical implementation plan for genomics medicine services, to ensure this potential is realised and the risks are mitigated.

The College's call for the next government:

- The creation of a regulatory body, similar to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) to oversee genomic testing in the UK would protect the public and the NHS. It would support the UK's continuing global leadership in collaborative genomic research and delivery of a high-quality genomics clinical service.

Pensions

- The widely-reported problems with the NHS pension scheme have led to some consultants reducing their hours or taking early retirement. It is crucial that these experienced professionals stay in the health service.



The College's call for the next government:

- While the one year NHS England action is welcome, a long term UK wide government solution is required.

References

1. The Royal College of Pathologists, *Meeting Pathology Demand, Histopathology workforce census*, 2018.

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About the Royal College of Pathologists

The Royal College of Pathologists is a professional membership organisation with more than 11,000 fellows, affiliates and trainees. We are committed to setting and maintaining professional standards and promoting excellence in the teaching and practice of pathology, for the benefit of patients.

Our members include medically and veterinary qualified pathologists and clinical scientists in 17 different specialties, including cellular pathology, haematology, clinical biochemistry, medical microbiology and veterinary pathology.

The College works with pathologists at every stage of their career. We set curricula, organise training and run exams, publish clinical guidelines and best practice recommendations and provide continuing professional development. We engage a wide range of stakeholders to improve awareness and understanding of pathology and the vital role it plays in everybody's healthcare. Working with members, we run programmes to inspire the next generation to study science and join the profession.

