



UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Careers in Forensics

Coroner

A coroner is a public official, appointed or elected, whose official duty is to make inquiry into deaths. The coroner's primary duty is to investigate the death and complete the certificate of death. The coroner assigns a cause, such as disease, injury, and manner of death and lists them on the certificate of death. The coroner also decides if a death was from natural circumstances or was due to accident, homicide, suicide or undetermined circumstances. Depending upon the area, the coroner may or may not be trained in the medical sciences. The coroner may employ physicians, pathologists, or forensic pathologists to perform autopsies when there appears to be a question about the manner of death.

Medical Examiner

A medical examiner is a physician. When acting in an official capacity, the medical examiner investigates and examines persons dying from a sudden, unexpected or violent death. The role of a medical examiner differs from that of the non-physician coroner. The medical examiner is expected to bring medical expertise to the evaluation of the medical history and physical examination of the deceased. The medical examiner usually is not required to be a specialist in death investigation or pathology and may practice any branch of medicine.

Pathologist

A pathologist is a physician trained in the medical specialty of pathology. Pathology is the branch of forensic medicine that deals with the diagnosis of disease and causes of death by means of laboratory examination of body fluids (clinical pathology), cell samples (cytology), and tissues (pathologic anatomy). The autopsy is the procedure utilized to study the dead. It is both an external and an internal examination for the purpose of diagnosing disease and determining the presence or absence of injury.

Forensic Pathologist

A forensic pathologist is a sub-specialist in pathology whose area of specialty is the examination of persons who die sudden, unexpected or violent death. The forensic pathologist is an expert in determining cause and manner of death. The forensic pathologist is specially trained to perform autopsies to determine the presence or absence of disease, injury or poisoning; to evaluate historical and law-enforcement investigative information relating to manner of death; to collect medical evidence, such as trace evidence and secretions, to document sexual assault; and to reconstruct how a person received injuries. Forensic pathologists are trained in multiple non-medical sciences as well as traditional medicine. Other areas of science that the forensic pathologist must have a working knowledge of are: toxicology, firearms examination (wound ballistics), trace evidence, forensic serology and DNA technology.

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Clinical Forensic Pathology

Because of their expertise in interpreting methods of injury, many forensic pathologists also examine, upon request, living patients including individuals who have been sexually assaulted (rape) and children who have been injured, to assist in determining if child abuse or neglect has occurred. The forensic pathologist also examines patients to determine whether the pattern of injuries is consistent with accidental or intentionally inflicted injuries. During these examinations a forensic pathologist may collect evidence analysis. Examination of living patients is customarily performed on behalf of law-enforcement agencies needing the same information on the living as required on dead victims of injury. On average, clinical forensic pathologists earn an annual salary between \$60,000 to \$180,000, depending on experience, geographical area, and level of responsibility.

Where do Forensic Pathologists Work?

Forensic pathologists are employed by states, counties, groups of counties, or cities, as well as by medical schools, the military services, and the federal government.

What Type of Education is Required?

- 1) After high school, the future forensic pathologist attends college for 4 years and receives a bachelor's degree.
- 2) After undergraduate school, the aspiring forensic pathologist spends 4 years in medical school, earning a M.D. or D.O. degree.
- 3) After medical school, there are several routes by which one may become a forensic pathologist:
 - One may spend 5 years training in anatomic and clinical pathology followed by 1 year of residency or fellowship in forensic pathology.
 - A second option is to train for 4 years in anatomic pathology and train for 1 year in forensic pathology.
 - The residency training in forensic pathology involves practical experience supervised by a trained forensic pathologist. The forensic pathology resident actually performs autopsies and participates in death investigations.

Where Can I Get More Information?

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<http://www.unr.edu/med/dept/Pathology/>