

Cytopathology Reporting: The Biomedical Scientist perspective.

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Of all the disciplines in pathology, Cytopathology, although being one of the smaller branches of this diagnostic service, has probably had the biggest impact on the workforce in respect of professional development opportunities and the redefining of professional boundaries.

Cytology was also the first pathology discipline to benefit from the open-ended flexibility offered by the original healthcare science career pathway in 2001.

“Seize the moment”

A shortage of Cytopathologists in the early years of the millennium to report Gynaecological Cytology offered the opportunity for biomedical scientists to expand their role based on a response to service need whilst potentially removing perceived professional glass ceilings.

IBMS/RCPATH work together

It is nearly fifteen years since a then ground-breaking examination, delivered jointly between the Institute of Biomedical Science (IBMS) and the RCPATH was launched, with the aim of enabling successful candidates to report and sign out abnormal cervical smears.

This examination was ground-breaking in two respects; it gave open recognition of an advanced 'consultant' role for biomedical scientists, and it also marked the beginning of a new collaborative approach to working between the College and the Institute.



Context of the examination

The preparation for the examination requires those taking the qualification not to just have an in depth theoretical and practical knowledge of Cytopathology but also a far wider knowledge of the diagnostic significance of cytopathology and multi-disciplinary team working.

The development of the role and the examinations has produced a cohort of individuals who are confident professional communicators and are part of a departmental reporting team working alongside medical pathologists to ensure that turnaround times are met.

Consultant biomedical scientists can free-up their medical colleagues to attend to more complex samples and to train their junior colleagues. One might even suggest that they could become supervisors to other 'budding' consultant biomedical scientists.

Since the first examinations the qualification has been regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to be 'fit-for-purpose' and relevant to UK Cervical Screening Programmes.

Advanced Specialist Diplomas

IBMS Advanced Specialist Diplomas (ASD) consolidate the highest levels of knowledge and expertise and demonstrate expertise within a discipline, build upon the IBMS Higher Specialist Diploma (HSD) and link to professional doctorates.

The IBMS Advanced Specialist Diploma in Cervical Cytology enables biomedical scientists to demonstrate the scientific and clinical knowledge that underpins the practice of cervical cytology and the practical competence required to screen, interpret and report normal and abnormal cervical cytology results.



Candidates who achieve the IBMS ASD in Cervical Cytology will be able to:

- undertake a role that involves the independent interpretation, evaluation and reporting of cervical cytology samples
- offer expert professional advice on patient management and follow-up

- participate in the training of biomedical scientists and specialist trainee medical staff in the reporting of normal and abnormal cervical cytology samples

The IBMS Advanced Specialist Diploma in Non-Gynaecological Cytology enables biomedical scientists to demonstrate the scientific and clinical knowledge that underpins the assessment of non-gynaecological cytology specimens.

Candidates who achieve the IBMS ASD in non-gynaecological cytology will be able to:

- undertake a role that involves the acquisition, preparation, assessment and reporting of selected non-gynaecological cytology specimens, including those where a clinically significant diagnosis is made

- offer expert professional advice on non-gynaecological cytology specimen reporting
- participate in training of biomedical scientists and specialist trainee medical staff in the reporting of normal and abnormal non-gynaecological cytology

Success of the qualifications

Number of passes

- ASD cervical cytology – 99 passes since 2001 (62 on first attempt) out of a total of 174 candidates
- ASD non-gynae – 2 passes
- DEP non-gynae – 36 passes out of 67 candidates

A mark of the success of the examination is that it has become the model for IBMS/RCPATH examinations for biomedical scientists who now report gynaecological malignancies and non-gynaecological Cytology and also for joint working in Histopathology.

IBMS/RCPATH joint working

Other examples of IBMS/RCPATH joint working are:

- Ophthalmic pathology – BMS reporting role
- Histopathological dissection
- Histopathology reporting
- *Fine Needle Aspirations*

Role re-modelling

In the enabling of biomedical scientists to undertake advanced professional roles, Cytopathology has lead the way in respect of role remodelling. As well as defining a reporting role for biomedical scientists.

Consultant biomedical scientist are now an accepted part of multi-disciplinary team meetings, contributing on an equal professional footing with clinicians in the evaluation of complex cases and subsequent treatment plans.

For many patients attending aspiration clinics a biomedical scientist is present as part of the professional team present, advising on stain quality and adequacy of the sample to ensure the patient does not have to be recalled for a new appointment and a repeat sample.

Concluding thoughts

The Institute of Biomedical Science has indeed 'seized the moment' and has made the most out of an opportunity that has presented itself and has worked with other organisations to develop Cytology not only for the benefit of its members but also for the public.

Thank you for listening

