

The Path to Pathology Residency: Tips for Tailoring Your Application Specifically for IMGs

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During the academic journey, there's a magical moment when pathology comes up as a possible career choice. For some, this moment can be a clear and immediate realization, and for others a gradual interest that develops over time. No matter which camp you fall in, the best time to start building our CV towards pathology is when you realize that it's your true passion. Are you worried that you may not have taken any steps to reflect your interest in pathology? Worry not! There is always something you can do to tailor your application towards pathology.

We are aware that program directors and the faculty members reviewing our applications lead busy lives, often needing to review our applications quickly. Our goal is to craft an application that shouts our passion for pathology. The extent of what you can do largely depends on the time remaining until the ERAS application submission deadline. The more time you have, the more you can accomplish.

Many international medical graduates (IMGs) lack exposure to pathology during their medical school years, which means they must find ways to demonstrate their interest in this field. As you may know, our ERAS application comprises various components, including our observership experiences, research projects, and publications. In each of these areas, we have the opportunity to emphasize our passion for pathology. Better to tailor as many areas as we can toward pathology. So, regardless of which part of our application is under review, there will be something related to pathology that stands out.

If you find yourself at the beginning of your medical journey and are fortunate enough to know that pathology is your calling, that's fantastic! Starting early can be incredibly advantageous. One of the best steps you can take is to get involved in a pathology research project, as this carries some weight in your application. Don't forget to reach out to the pathology department at your medical school; they might have ongoing research projects. Additionally, inquire about opportunities to shadow their staff. Sometimes, luck is on your side, and you may even have the chance to observe or participate in their sign-outs or grossing procedures. If you don't have access to a pathology department within your own institution, feel free to branch out and ask people through social media, and MatchToPath!

In the post-COVID-19 era, many of the international medical graduates decide not to travel to do in-person observerships. If so, try to at least do some of the virtual observerships if available. You can also choose to shadow at a local pathology lab and request a letter of recommendation. You can also approach pathology community in and outside the United States via social media and request for a case report/any research project that you can potentially work on remotely.

As the application deadline approaches, it is important to consider pathology observerships to demonstrate your ongoing interest in pathology and for non-US graduates your awareness of the state of pathology within the U.S. healthcare system. During your observerships, aim to gain exposure to Clinical Pathology (CP) as well, such as spending a few days in the Blood Bank Transfusion Service, Microbiology, Clinical Chemistry, etc.

In the US, both medical autopsy and forensic medicine are integrated into our pathology training, and your eligibility for the Anatomic Pathology board examinations is contingent upon completion of at least 30 autopsies during residency training. This aspect is of particular concern to many programs, as they seek assurance that their future resident is comfortable with autopsy procedures. To alleviate their concerns, make an effort to gain exposure to autopsies during your observerships. Many of the institutions accept applications for on-site observerships at least 12-18 months in advance. Though, there are various uncertainties associated with USMLE exams, visa applications and travel, it is wiser to start reaching out for observerships as early as possible. There is no magic rule for getting an in-person observership. Some of the institutions have listed in their website and many do not. Key is to keep writing cold emails expressing your interests and listing some of the timeframes that suits you. Reaching out to the prior year applicants to make a list of the places which provide opportunities can also be helpful. Also, don't forget to reach out to mentors active in the social media.

Another valuable opportunity to highlight your interest in pathology is by becoming a member of pathology societies and attending pathology conferences. There are several outstanding national meetings annually, such as The United States and Canadian Academy of Pathology (USCAP), College of American Pathologists (CAP), American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP), among others. Furthermore, many states host their own pathology societies and conferences, such as the Florida Society of Pathology (FSP) and the Texas Society of Pathology (TSP), to name a few.

When it comes to conferences and memberships, a challenge is often the registration fees. Unfortunately, there is not a specific registration category for international medical graduates (IMGs), and these fees can be quite expensive. There are a couple of strategies you can try: reach out to their customer service and explain your situation; sometimes, they may offer more affordable options. Additionally, consider asking your mentor or friends if they can list your name as a guest for these conferences.

Finally, don't forget to create a Twitter/X account and become a part of #PathTwitter if you haven't already. This can provide you with an opportunity to connect with various pathology faculty members, colleagues, and residents. Don't hesitate to reach out to them for further assistance and advice!