



National Society for Histotechnology
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How I Got Into Histology By: Edwin Montalvo

Go back in time... February 23, 2014 I started as a Laboratory Assistant in the Core Processing department for the largest healthcare system of the Pacific Northwest. This is where I learned everything about processing and blood testing and ended up getting my certification as a Phlebotomist in 2016. An opportunity opened back in 2016 as a Laboratory Assistant for the Histology department of the same healthcare system and I was intrigued by it and I had my interview and I was chosen for the job. I had no idea what I was getting into. My trainer did an amazing job showing me every little thing she could teach me and all the tips and tricks in order to be successful in my role since I was replacing her as she was moving on to be a Histotechnician. Time passed and I learned quickly the Histology workflow, understood the processors we had and the quirks of each of them. I fell in love with the role and I was 100% invested in making sure everything was done and everyone had what they needed in order to keep things going smooth. I fell in love with the block matching process and understanding the slides I had in front of me. I started asking more questions regarding the processes and my supervisor at the time seemed pretty happy that I was asking those questions. She was more than happy to guide me and feed that hunger for knowledge.

Long story short, in 2016 I was approached by my supervisor, as few Histotech positions were going to be open, and she wanted me to apply and be part of the interview process along with other candidates. I guess showing my interest and being so intrigued by Histology was part of a winning combination since I was accepted to be an OTJ (On the Job Training) Histotech. Reality sank in and I started to panic.

Training started with the basics of embedding and it was split by different types, fat specimens, skin, gi's and needle cores. I love embedding and all it entails. In my eyes it's art. It's my portion of a long workflow, and I know if my portion is well done, whoever is next cutting my block most likely will have no problem getting a section. (Embedding skin is my favorite!)

Then sitting in front of the microtome... OMG! Stressed out to the max...! I was able to understand the functions and all the precautionary things to be done in order to not lose a finger! Yikes! After I learned sectioning and making my slides, I was pretty happy with my performance, but I was not up to speed to my new supervisor's standards, so I was left to embed all shift long. It became quite monotonous but still I was doing my job, respecting the patient with care.



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Looking to learn more about Histo, I came upon an opportunity to do OTJ at another health system in the area and I hesitated to apply at first because I thought almost a year of OTJ was not enough and I wasn't sure if I would be able to make it through the interview. After a few days, I thought... I can't sell myself short.. I'm smart and I love this stuff. So, I did apply. A new chapter started 3 months ago, and the training has been quite fun. Coworkers love to help me out and explain things. My current supervisor is very happy with my performance and I get to do so many different tasks every day that my brain is always active trying to capture as much info as I can. Now we have 2 new OTJ at the lab and everyone is thankful that I was able to make a positive impact in order to revamp the OTJ at this laboratory.

Getting involved in the Histology world has been the best thing I've done and I look forward to many more years to come. Long term goals are to get my certification of course and my short term goals are to improve my speed without compromising quality or my fingers! 😊

I always think of this... **IF I CAN DREAM IT, I CAN ACHIEVE IT!**