

National Society for Histotechnology Policy Statement and Position on Workforce Shortages

Position Statement

The National Society for Histotechnology believes that the lack of available qualified personnel within the histology field necessitates the creation of federal, state and local policies to increase visibility, guide regulation, and make educational programs and more accessible.

Background and Significance:

The histology workforce is facing a severe shortage of qualified histologists to keep anatomic pathology laboratories operating. According to a report by Wians et.al in 2013, the Center for Medicare Services (CMS) reports 172,467 high complexity laboratories. Of these, 5.3 percent (9111) are “histopathology” (Wians & Gill, 2013). This does not account for veterinary, industry, or research laboratories. The distribution of total test volume is approximately 6 billion tests, 10 percent of which are in histopathology. The *United States Bureau of Labor and Statistics Outlook* projects that over the next 10 years (2020-2030), the medical laboratory field will grow by 11% (*Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2022). However, the Bureau of Labor and Statistics does not classify histologist with a distinct code, grouping histologist under clinical laboratory technician and technologist, underestimating the total number of histologist nationwide (Marcelus & Packert, 2024). In 2018, histopathology laboratories reported a vacancy rate of 8.3 percent and retirement rate over 11 percent. Many laboratory professionals are reporting “burnout” especially after the COVID19 Pandemic due to the staffing shortages and high volume testing (Kroft, 2020). By 2024, staff vacancies have ballooned to over 20 percent and supervisory role vacancies exceed 14 percent. Overall retirement rates have also increased to over 20 percent (Garcia et al., 2025). The vacancies and retirement rates clearly demonstrate the need to increase the workforce with qualified personnel to meet the testing demand that will only increase in volume as the general population ages.

Due to low enrolment, low visibility and lack of clinical laboratory partners for histology programs, the number of National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Science (NAACLS) accredited histology programs has remained steady at 48 nationwide as of 2023 (Bain et al., 2024; Criswell, 2023). Four-year HTL programs remain at less than 10. This lack of accessibility of histology programs and qualified graduates leaves the onus of acquiring new hires on histopathology laboratory professionals. In fact, a recent survey indicates that the majority of histologist learn about the profession from a family member, friend or acquaintance (Guenther et al., 2024). This approach to professional recruitment is not sufficient to meet the current or future needs. Additional resources and support at the federal and state level are needed to build a sustainable workforce (Marcelus & Packert, 2024)

The primary challenge that histotechnology professionals face is that of low visibility; low visibility affects staffing, pay, and availability of resources to address the workforce shortage (Garcia et al., 2020; Kroft, 2020). Histologists do not fall under CLIA oversight. As a result, there are no federal regulations determining who can work in a histopathology laboratory and what education, training and certification are required (Chlipala et al., 2024; Nieto Sierra & Gefen, 2024). Other challenges to the workforce include high stress, burnout, low pay, and an increasing workload. A recent ASCP clinical laboratory survey reports that 85 percent of survey respondents reported burnout, and 37 percent report increased workload and inadequate staffing as contributing factors (Dwyer et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2020). According to the 2019 ASCP Wage Survey, average histotechnician and histotechnologist wages are more than 14 percent lower than other laboratory professionals and 45 percent of respondents reported being underpaid or underappreciated, especially compared to other allied health professions (Garcia et al., 2021).

Recommendations:

To build a pipeline that meets the needs of the current and future workforce, it is necessary to support existing educational programs and create new programs to sustain the current and future workforce. Action today will not be evident for at least several years so it is imperative to act now. The National Society for Histotechnology supports efforts that will:

- Establish minimum educational requirements under CLIA that are consistent with current medical laboratory best practices and that lead to National Certification and State Licensure where appropriate.
- Recognize the need for non-traditional educational pathways due to the need to supplement the workforce during critical workforce shortages.

The National Society for Histotechnology recognizes the need for “on the job training”. On the job training is intended to supplement an employee’s education by providing specific training in institutional operating procedures, policies and workflow. The National Society for Histotechnology does not support “on the job training” in lieu of post-secondary education. In addition, the National Society for Histotechnology encourages Federal and State authorities to:

- Increase exposure and visibility of Histotechnology/Laboratory Sciences through supported promotional activities (career fairs, public service announcements).
- Provide incentive and resources for students interested in careers in Histotechnology/Laboratory Sciences by expanding federal or state scholarship opportunities.
- Develop loan forgiveness (service awards) or repayment programs to defray educational costs for students attending Histotechnology/Laboratory Science programs.
- Provide funding for the support of Histotechnology/Laboratory Science programs to increase student enrollment and capacity.
- Provide incentives for federally funded institutions to support laboratories that form training affiliations with local, regional or national laboratory science programs.

The National Society for Histotechnology supports efforts like the American Society of Association Executives *Freedom to Invest in Tomorrow's Workforce Act* . This measure, in part, was incorporated into a large tax package signed in July of 2025. The measure expands qualified expenses under 529 savings plans to include postsecondary training and credentialing, such as licenses and non-governmental certifications. The bill provides valuable tax-advantaged resources for families, students and workers-with or without a college degree-who pursue career growth, mid-career changes or pathways that diverge from a typical academic route.

About the National Society for Histotechnology

The National Society for Histotechnology is a non-profit professional membership organization representing histology professionals practicing in the medical and public health laboratory workforce. Histotechnology is the science dealing with the structure of cells and their formation into tissues and organs. The profession is responsible for the preparation of all pathological tissue samples removed and collected from the human body. The samples are assessed microscopically for diagnostic, prognostic and treatment purposes. The National Society of Histotechnology supports practicing histologists worldwide by providing education to train and demonstrate competency in an increasingly complex medical laboratory-testing environment.

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