

The Role of Pathologist in Modern Oncology Practice

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Abstract

Background: Pathologists are often viewed as the invisible members of oncology multidisciplinary teams, yet major decisions about patient care are totally dependent on their input. Making an accurate diagnosis is the first and most crucial step in managing cancer patients, which is the pathologist's arena.

Methods: Information about the topic was compiled from literature review, professional societies publications, colleagues input and personal experience.

Results: The purpose of this manuscript is to illustrate and outline the comprehensive role that should be fulfilled by a competent pathologist in providing state of the art service to oncology practices and to encourage maximum utilization of this role. The pathologist's role in oncology practices is becoming increasingly critical due to the accelerated rate of new diagnostic tools and tests used in clinical applications. The roles of pathologist's include making accurate diagnoses, evaluating disease response, participating in tumor boards, educating staff and conducting research.

Conclusion: The role of pathologist is central to modern oncology practice and the pathologist is an integral member of the oncology care team. Various medical specialties and subspecialties have emerged over the last few decades creating increasing complexities in functions and roles of various healthcare professionals. To ensure best patient care, a strong cooperation among these subspecialties is crucial.

Some specialties are essential for any tertiary health care center such as laboratory medicine and radiology, because all other services are dependent on them. For example, a surgeon may need the guidance of the pathologist preoperatively and intraoperatively for optimal completion of surgery. Similarly, an oncologist will not be able to treat a cancer patient appropriately without a proper diagnosis made by a pathologist. Since many of their activities are done away from the clinic or the patients, pathologists are considered by some as invisible members of oncology care team in spite of their critical role.

The pathologist has multiple roles in the contemporary and future oncology practice that are presented and discussed in this manuscript. (Table 1)