

SKIN CANCER CHAMPIONS COMMUNITY

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Introduction to Pathology Reports

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What is a pathologist?

A pathologist is a doctor who is trained to look at body tissue. This helps other doctors figure out the disease or illness. A pathologist:

- Will look at body tissue with the “naked eye”. This means they will look at it without the help of any tools.
- Will look at body tissue under a microscope.
- May perform lab tests on the tissue.



What is a pathology report? How is it used?

A “pathology report” lists what the pathologist sees. This may include what they see with the “naked eye” and under the microscope. This document is used by other doctors and the patient. It may:

- Share what is seen under the microscope.
- Provide a diagnosis or a list of likely diagnoses. A diagnosis is the name of the disease you have.
- Provide a brief outline with next steps. This helps your doctor know if more tissue needs to be taken.

Pathology reports do not normally include treatment options. Instead, they are used only to help make a diagnosis. Patients are given access to their own pathology reports. Some doctors may not have access to this report if they:

- Are in a different practice than the pathologist.
- Use a different electronic health record system.

What does “Gross Description” mean?

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“Gross description” refers to what the body tissue looks like to the “naked eye”. This includes the size, shape, and color of the tissue.

A pathologist provider will record what the tissue looks like. They will also measure and weigh it. After, they will decide which areas of the tissue to sample and cut. These areas will be looked at under the microscope. During this process, certain areas of the tissue may be inked. This helps the pathologist know which side is which. This helps your doctor know where to take more tissue if needed.

Why did the pathologist describe what they saw? What does it mean?

The pathologist may sometimes describe what they see under the microscope. Sometimes they provide this because they want to support the diagnosis. Other times they do this when the final diagnosis is unclear. This can give your doctor an idea of what the pathologist saw.

What does “clinicopathologic correlation recommended” mean?

The pathologist only sees what it is under the microscope. Sometimes they can use what they see to provide one diagnosis. Other times, they may provide a list of diagnoses. This is because some skin diseases share features under the microscope.

If this happens your doctor will make a diagnosis based on:

- Your history of your illness or disease (‘clinico-’)
- What your skin looks like (‘clinico-’)
- What is seen under the microscope (‘pathologic’)

Why should I keep my pathology results? How can I?

There are many healthcare systems. They may have different health record systems. This means that doctors may not have access to your prior pathology results.

You should keep records of your results. You can do this by:

- Printing the results. You should keep these results in a folder. You can bring this folder with you to doctor’s visits.

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- Taking a photo of the results. You should keep the photo in a folder on your mobile devices. You can pull up these records at doctor's visits.

If you do this you will always have your records on hand. This can be helpful when you see a new doctor.

You should ask the new doctor if they have access to your past health records. This includes pathology results. If they do not, you should fill out a "Release of Information" form. The doctor's office will have this form. This will allow them to receive your past health records.