

Position Statement

Subject: **The Role of a Pathology Clinical Scientist in Australia**
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The provision of safe, efficient and effective pathology services in Australia relies on the input of many individuals with different roles and responsibilities. The training and qualifications of these individuals must prepare them for the roles they are expected to perform, and the overall makeup of the pathology workforce should ensure appropriate supervision and oversight at all steps in the testing cycle.

Pathologist

The pathologist is a medical specialist with a Fellowship of the RCPA in one of the following disciplines; Anatomical Pathology, Chemical Pathology, Forensic Pathology, General Pathology, Genetic Pathology, Haematology, Immunopathology or Microbiology.

The pathologist is in a unique position, having the background of medical training with discipline specific specialist training designed to give them the skills and knowledge to fulfil the role of interfacing the clinical and laboratory components. They are the only profession to have overall responsibility for Clinical Governance and Supervision, within their scope of practice, under the [Requirements for the Supervision in the Clinical Governance of Medical Pathology Laboratories \(Fifth Edition 2018\)](#)

The pathologist works in collaboration with non-medically qualified scientific and technical staff that perform the testing and manage the day to day operations of the laboratory. This relationship is fundamental to achieving high quality pathology test results and correct clinical interpretation.

Clinical Scientist

A Clinical Scientist is a scientist with at least 5 years' relevant medical laboratory experience and possesses one or more of the following qualifications by examination:

- Fellowship of Australasian Association of Clinical Biochemists;
- Fellowship of the Australian Institute of Medical Scientists;
- Fellowship of the Australian Society for Microbiology (Medical Microbiology or Clinical Microbiology);
- Fellowship of the Human Genetics Society of Australasia (Biochemical Genetics, Cytogenetics or Molecular Genetics);
- Fellowship of the Australian Society of Cytology;
- Fellowship of the Faculty of Science (by examination) of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia; or
- Doctor of Philosophy (in a subject relevant to the scope of diagnostic testing of the laboratory they are supervising)

Their qualifications and experience give them a unique position in the laboratory, combining clinical problem solving with scientific management and in-depth knowledge of methodologies and instrumentation. They are typically responsible for day to day supervision of testing, within their

scope of practice, in many cases generating reports, and will identify results requiring urgent action or referral to the pathologist as well as advising clinicians on testing.

Clinical Scientists with a PhD and/or some of the scientific association Fellowships and Fellowship of the Faculty of Science of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, will also have demonstrated their research capabilities and contributed to the scientific literature.

Clinical Scientists play a key role in regulatory compliance and quality management. They are responsible for instrument and method selection, validation and ongoing monitoring. They can offer advice on testing and result interpretation to clinical colleagues and play a key role in the training of laboratory staff including pathologists. In specialist fields they are involved in research and development of new assays and in bringing new developments into clinical use. They may have academic titles and undertake postgraduate student supervision via universities.

Appropriate clinical and scientific governance and supervision requires highly skilled and trained staff with both medical and science backgrounds. To minimise risks to patients, the College believes that laboratories operating at the highest level of clinical and scientific governance should have both a pathologist and clinical scientist with scope of practice in their particular disciplines.

If a GX or GY laboratory is undertaking testing which leads to an individual interpretative comment because of the complexity of the analytical technique, then a Clinical Scientist should supervise the analytical phase of the testing process. Examples include toxicology, genomics, biochemical genetics and tissue typing.