

FAQs about Post-Sophomore Pathology Fellowships (PSF)

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What is a Post-Sophomore Fellowship (PSF)?

A PSF is a one-year program which typically occurs between a medical student's second and third year of medical school. However, it is possible for it to occur between the third and fourth year (post –junior fellow), and in some cases, it can occur after graduating from medical school.

Individuals will work for a year in the pathology department and take on roles like first-year pathology residents. They will rotate through different parts of the pathology department and undertake tasks such as making diagnoses using a microscope, writing reports, reviewing cases with the attending pathologists, performing autopsies, growing tissue, participating in electives (clinical or research), and educating medical students.

How long is a PSF?

A PSF is a one-year program and involves taking a year off from medical school to complete the fellowship program. Taking time off from medical school is a complex decision. While it may not be for everyone, there are advantages to doing a fellowship in pathology.

Do I have to be going into pathology to do a PSF?

No! Although the goal of many programs is to promote the field of pathology and encourage medical students to consider a career in pathology, there is absolutely no expectation that you will go into a pathology residency.

I'm not planning on going into pathology, should I still consider doing a PSF?

Absolutely! The pathology department is often considered a "black box" by many of those in other medical specialties – that is, those in other medical specialties may not understand the nuances or workflow of pathology, or how best to utilize the pathology department as a consulting specialty. Having the experience of a PSF year is a huge asset to those going into any other medical specialty (and it looks great on a CV, too).

What are some of the benefits to doing a PSF?

One of the biggest benefits is the valuable experience you gain in pathology. If you choose to do a pathology residency, this looks great on your CV, and is highly valued by pathology residency programs. Not only that, but you will already have had a year of experience, making the transition from medical school to residency that much easier.

For those not going into pathology as your chosen specialty, you will still gain an understanding and appreciation of the pathology department and how it works. Knowing the ins and outs of pathology, and more importantly what you can and cannot expect from your pathology department, will help you be a better doctor.

Other benefits include gaining procedural and anatomy skills (this translates well into most other medical specialties, especially those that are procedural in nature), research opportunities (most fellows have ample opportunity to participate in research and have abstracts or manuscripts accepted), mentorship, networking opportunities, career development, teaching opportunities, and much more.

Who offers a PSF?

Not every institution offers a PSF. A list of PSF opportunities can be found on our website under [elective opportunities](#).

My institution doesn't offer a PSF year. Can I apply at one that does?

Yes. Most institutions will give priority to internal applicants, but internal applicants may vary from year to year, so there could be an opening in the year you are thinking of applying. It is a good idea to reach out to the program(s) you are interested in to check for availability, and to determine if they are accepting applications from external applicants.

What are the criteria for applying to a PSF?

While the criteria can vary between institutions, there are some criteria that apply to most PSFs. These include successful completion of first two years of medical school, being in good academic standing, a CV, a personal statement, letters of recommendation, and transcript and academic records. Some institutions may require USMLE/COMLEX scores depending on your level of training. Please be sure to check individual program websites, or reach out directly to them, for their specific application information.

What is the general timeline for applying to and starting a PSF?

The application timeline will vary by institution. In general, deadlines and interviews are around November or between February & April for a July start date. However, institutions may have rolling application timelines or unexpected openings. In addition, some institutions have earlier start dates, or may even have flexible start dates. Be sure to check individual program websites for timelines and reach out to see if there are openings available.

What are some common interview questions during a PSF interview?

Why are you interested in doing the a post-sophomore fellowship? This seems like a no-brainer, but be sure that you have thought about this and you can articulate it well during your interview. You will likely be asked this question by multiple people during your interview.

What areas of pathology are you interested in? This is another common question. Be honest about what you are and are not interested in and why. It's also okay to not know – after all, most people applying for a PSF are early in their medical school journey and will not know all the different aspects of pathology. That being said, you should have a cursory understanding of what pathology is and be able to state your interests in the various subspecialties.

What do you plan to accomplish during fellowship? There are different variations of this question, but they all get at the same point: what you want to get out of the fellowship? Do you want research experience? To bulk up your CV? To get experience in pathology before going on to surgery residency? There is no one right answer to this question, but it will help the program know your goals and how to help you accomplish them.

Are there ways to enhance your application?

Most institutions have their own way of choosing fellows from their applicant pool. In general, programs are looking for hard-working, reliable individuals who are genuinely

interested in pursuing the post-sophomore fellowship, regardless of whether they intend to pursue a career in pathology. Use your personal statement to show your interest in the program that you are applying to and to communicate why you are interested in the PSF. If you have any research experience or experience in pathology, make sure to include it in your CV. You should also seek out strong letters of recommendation. It may not be possible to get letters from pathologists, so seek out mentors who know you and your work ethic. Keep in mind, a strong letter of recommendation from a non-pathologist may be better than a weak letter from a pathologist.

Do I get paid during a PSF?

Yes, fellows are typically considered employees, and are therefore paid a salary stipend. During this time, you are also eligible for student loan deferral. In addition, many PSF programs offer their fellows a book fund or research fund. Programs may also pay for travel and attendance at a conference if the fellow is the primary presenter.