

Applying to Pathology as a DO

Written by: Adam Berry

Peer Reviewed by: Meredith Herman, DO and Kamran Mirza, MD, PhD

Being an osteopathic medical student interested in pathology can be an intimidating and lonely undertaking. You may be the only one in your class interested in pathology, your classmates may not even know what a pathologist is, and you may not be totally sure yourself! However, don't worry, pathology is a fantastic specialty filled with kind and supportive people eager to help you succeed! Here, we've identified some roadblocks you may run into along the way that can be particularly challenging for DOs, but overall, this should be a great experience for you and we're sure you'll find success!

Unique Challenges

1. Limited Access to Academic Pathology Departments

- a. While this is not a universal problem for DO students nor is it unique to the osteopathic profession, it is a common concern.
- b. This equates to less exposure to pathology early in medical school, fewer academic mentors, and not as many opportunities to work with pathologists long-term which can lead to less impactful letters of recommendation.
- c. Some students may struggle to complete any kind of pathology elective before the 4th year, which can negatively impact performance on away rotations and students' understanding of the field.

2. Stigma towards Osteopathic Medical Students

- a. Pathology as a field is very accepting of DOs in general. There are still a few programs that rarely, if ever, accept DO students, but most programs have at least one osteopathically trained resident.
- b. While the stigma is steadily decreasing, it may still be necessary to explain certain aspects of your training, such as the COMLEX exam or what OMT/OMM is.

3. Scarce Mentorship

- a. There are simply not very many students entering pathology from osteopathic medical schools, so it may be difficult to identify mentors who have recently successfully matched into pathology.

4. DO's are a Minority

- a. According to the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) advanced data tables 2024, 89 DO seniors matched into pathology in 2024. Overall, about 1-2% of all fourth year DOs apply to pathology each year. DOs are a minority of the applicant pool statistically speaking but have excellent match rate.

Solutions and Strategies

1. Lack of Access

a. Away Rotations

- i. Take advantage of the Visiting Student Learning Opportunities (VSLO) site to spend time at a few academic pathology departments. Learn if an academic setting is right for you.
- ii. Arrange shadowing experience with a local pathologist during your 1st and 2nd years of medical school.
- iii. Find out if your school has options for pathology elective rotations in your third year. If no options are available, ask what you can do to help them get one set up for you. Be willing to call or visit the local pathology department if your school allows you to set up your own rotations.

b. Attend Conferences

- i. The College of American Pathologists (CAP) hosts bi-annual meetings. This is a great place to interact with both academic and community pathologists. Try to meet people and network to see if these are the kind of people you want to spend your training with.
- ii. Conferences with scholarships for medical students
 1. CAP
 - a. Distinguished medical student award.
 - b. CAP medical student travel grant
 2. Association of Pathology Chairs
 - a. Kinney Scholars program
 - b. Medical Student Interest Group Grant
 3. USCAP
 - a. Molecular Genetics Workshop

c. Engage with a Pathology Interest Group

- i. If your medical school has an interest group, get involved with it. This will open leadership opportunities and experiences to connect in pathology.
- ii. If your medical school does not have a pathology interest group, start one! Find a faculty member and several classmates to start a group at your school.

d. Network

- i. Join the online pathology community on platforms like Twitter/X, Instagram, Kiko, LinkedIn, and more! Put your name out there and connect with pathologists in the field. You will find many are interested in helping students.
- ii. Ask questions and arrange time to talk more about the field.

2. Combating Stigma

- a. As you're putting together a list of programs to apply to for away rotations and residency, make sure that you look at their current trainees. What types of residents are matching into that program? What do they look for?
- b. Remember, if a program has no DO's in their program that does not mean they are biased against DO's. You may be the first DO to apply to that specific program in years. Apply where you want to go!
- c. Use your skills! When you visit a program for an away rotation and you find your own neck and upper back are sore after a long day at the scope, it's likely that the residents feel the same way. Offering manipulation techniques that you feel comfortable with can help everyone have a better understanding of what it is to be a DO. Who doesn't want a coresident that can fix their minor headaches and pop their back?

3. Enhancing Mentorship

- a. Pathologists are incredibly kind people overall who love to help people interested in their specialty. There are so many ways to connect with potential mentors virtually. Make an account on X and connect with #pathtwitter. Become part of an online pathology interest group through <https://www.virtualpathsig.org/>. If there is a program you're interested in, look for DOs currently training at that program and send them a professional email if their contact information is posted. It can be intimidating, but you can have meaningful success by putting yourself out there!