

My pager buzzed as “Frozen Section: Lumpectomy” flashed across the screen. I rushed to the frozen room to meet the surgical team and Pathologist. I listened closely to the surgeon’s concern for margins as the specimen was placed into my hands. Turning to the grossing bench, I examined the tissue with the Pathologist and discussed the best approach to the case. Carefully, I oriented the specimen, took measurements, and meticulously inked each margin. I guided the scalpel into the infiltrative mass before carefully cutting levels at the cryostat. I delivered the freshly stained slides and took a seat next to the pathologist at the multi-headed microscope. Together, we scanned the field, ultimately yielding a diagnosis of “Margin negative for malignancy.” I was fascinated by the challenge of solving a clinical question from gross to microscopic exam. As a post-sophomore pathology fellow, I discovered that no other specialty would bring me as much fulfillment as pathology.

My interest in pathology began the first time I examined blood under the microscope. At that time, I was an undergraduate in the biomedical laboratory scientist program. When studying cells and recalling their essential functions, I became fascinated by how a simple test could provide detailed information about one’s health. Moreover, I saw how laboratory results drastically impact patient care. This led me to seek out a translational research project in which I oversaw tissue processing and molecular studies of blood vessels from rodent models. I appreciated investigating the complex, multidimensional manifestations of disease which are often best explained by pathological investigation. This undertaking started my pursuit of a career that would incorporate research and contribute to medical advancement.

In medical school, I realized that pathology formed an essential component of every medical specialty. When I failed a preclinical course, I analyzed my weaknesses and realized I needed to adjust my study techniques to make stronger connections between difficult concepts. As a visually-oriented learner, I developed my own study strategies and adapted to the rigors of an intense program. Despite this difficult experience, I decided to turn my setback into a platform for personal growth and success. Since then, I have volunteered as an academic tutor to coach students through their own failures and help them reach their potential.

I took my gap year as an opportunity to further my enthusiasm for laboratory medicine as a post-sophomore pathology fellow at the University of Toledo Medical Center. There, I worked at a resident level on anatomic and clinical pathology rotations and saw how pathology formed the foundation of medical practice. I also developed my passion for teaching by leading medical students in preclinical small-groups and on clinical rotations. It gave me satisfaction to watch students apply pathology concepts to real-life cases. I also saw a need to improve pathology exposure in early medical education. Since then, I have continued to foster my dedication for outreach and education by co-founding the pathology interest group at my medical school.

To further my involvement in the greater pathology community, I accepted a position as Vice-President of the Virtual Pathology Student Interest Group. Through this I have collaborated with a diverse, global community of students, residents, and pathologists who share this common goal. It has brought me joy to collaborate on initiatives, create virtual events, and culture an excitement for pathology on a virtual platform. These experiences have shaped me as a leader,

future physician, and an advocate for the specialty, resulting in my nomination and selection for the Distinguished Medical Student Award by the College of American Pathologists.

My journey to pathology started at the microscope and has continued to encompass a breadth of experiences inside and outside the laboratory. I understand the value of the lab in guiding clinical decisions, beginning with a blood draw to a final diagnosis. Pathologists have the privilege to impact patients by answering questions in a way no other physician can, and I am eager to contribute to patient care in this way. I strive to expand my diagnostic skills in an Anatomic and Clinical pathology residency and further incorporate research, interdisciplinary collaboration and education outreach throughout my life's work as an academic surgical and cytopathologist. *By Meredith Herman, DO (Twitter: [@MeredithKHerman](https://twitter.com/MeredithKHerman))*