# Understanding COVID-19's Adverse Impact on Pathologists

October 26, 2020

**Julie McDowell:**

Approximately 85% of board-certified pathologists report that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted their practices according to a recent CAP survey. In this CAPcasts interview, Dr. Thomas Wheeler discusses the survey's findings, which confirmed the pandemic's ongoing adverse effects on pathologists as the United States has relied on COVID-19 testing throughout this national crisis. Dr. Wheeler is Chair of the CAP's Policy Roundtable Steering Committee. Dr. Wheeler, generally speaking, how has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted pathologists nationwide?

**Dr. Thomas Wheeler:**

Since March 2020, this pandemic has brought significant changes to pathology practices. Nearly 85% of respondents report that the pandemic has had an adverse economic impact on pathologists in their practice. While the most prevalent impacts were reductions in compensation, benefits or both, other impacts included delayed or postponed recruitment of pathologists, temporary furloughs, requirements to take paid time off or annual leave.

**Julie McDowell:**

Do you have any specific examples of how pathologists testing volume was adversely impacted?

**Dr. Thomas Wheeler:**

Yes, and I will give a few. 90% of respondents reported a decrease in estimated year to date anatomic path testing volume relative to the same period in 2019. 75% reported a decrease in estimated year to date non-COVID clinical pathology testing. The average estimated 2019 to 2020 decline in AP testing was 24.5%, and the average estimated 2019 to 2020 decline in non-COVID clinical pathology testing was 15.9%. These estimated rates of decline still represent an improvement from the situation reported by respondents to CAP's April 2020 and June 2020's lab director surveys however.

**Julie McDowell:**

Due to the increase in volume of COVID-19 testing, are pathologists working more hours than before?

**Dr. Thomas Wheeler:**

Well, the results are mixed. Nearly as many pathologists reported working more hours since the pandemic as reported working fewer hours. While 24% of respondents say they were working fewer hours, 20% said they're working more hours. On average, those working fewer hours were working 10 hours less per week while those working more hours were working nearly 12 hours more per week.

**Julie McDowell:**

Now, how are pathologists doing with the increase in testing volume and increased working hours?

**Dr. Thomas Wheeler:**

Important question. With more hours of work, clinical testing, comes more stress. For instance, just over 70% of respondents report much higher or slightly higher stress levels than before the pandemic. Reports of increased stress levels are somewhat higher among practice leaders than among non-practice leaders.

**Julie McDowell:**

Finally, Dr. Wheeler, is the pathology workforce impacted during the pandemic? For instance, is there evidence of layoffs or job loss?

**Dr. Thomas Wheeler:**

Well, fortunately there's little evidence of pathologists losing jobs as a result of the pandemic, despite concerns that practices might be reducing their pathologist workforce, nearly 98% of pathologists who were employed full-time on January 1st reported that they were working full-time when they took the survey. While some respondents reported a reduction in the number of full-time equivalent pathologists working in their practice since January 1st, nearly as many reported an increase and 62% reported that their practice size was unchanged.

**Julie McDowell:**

Thank you, Dr. Wheeler. For more information about this COVID-19 impact survey from the CAP'S Policy Roundtable, please visit the advocacy section of cap.org. Thank you for listening to this CAPcast. Be sure to listen to our other CAPcast from the CAP on our SoundCloud channel by downloading the SoundCloud app on your mobile device. And we're also on Apple Podcast and the Stitcher app. To find this podcast, search for the word CAPcast on these apps. Once you find our podcast, be sure to click the subscribe button so you don't miss new CAPcast episodes.