

Summer Studentships 2026/2027

PROJECT TITLE:

Documenting, Preserving and Digitising an Uncatalogued Pathology Museum Collection: An Action-Research and Educational Resource Development Project

AIM:

To systematically investigate and document previously uncatalogued human pathology specimens held in the Pathology Museum; develop a structured catalogue and digital database; create short educational videos and associated learning resources; and explore the ethical, cultural and practical frameworks required for the respectful stewardship, maintenance and educational use of anatomical and pathology collections.

METHODS:

The students will undertake a mixed-methods, action-research project in iterative cycles of review, documentation, evaluation and improvement. Activities will include: (1) reviewing relevant literature and institutional guidance on pathology and anatomical collections, specimen provenance, consent, ethical stewardship and educational use; (2) developing and piloting a standardised framework for describing specimens, including pathological features, organ/site, likely diagnosis, specimen type, age/era where available, provenance and educational value; (3) systematically examining and recording uncatalogued specimens and associated historical documentation; (4) constructing and quality-checking a searchable database; (5) photographing/filming selected specimens and developing short educational videos; (6) learning and applying appropriate laboratory procedures for specimen inspection, preservation and routine maintenance; and (7) keeping a reflective research log to identify barriers, ethical issues, quality issues and opportunities for improvement. A final cycle will evaluate the usefulness and educational potential of the resulting digital resource.

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE:

Pathology museums contain valuable material for understanding disease, pathology practice and the history of medicine, but older collections may contain specimens with incomplete or absent cataloguing. This project will address a knowledge gap by improving an under-documented collection into a structured, quality-assured educational resource while preserving the physical specimens. It will also examine the ethical and cultural responsibilities associated with human anatomical collections, including issues of provenance, consent, respectful treatment, access and appropriate educational use. The project will provide a model for responsible digitisation and educational reuse of pathology museum collections at Otago University and generate a sustainable resource for medical, biomedical and other health-professional students.

STUDENT'S ROLE AND EXPOSURE TO SCIENTIFIC METHOD:

Three students will work together on the project. Diverse skills are required. The students will participate in the full research process: defining the research problem; undertaking a focused literature and review; developing data fields and a specimen-description framework; piloting and refining methods; collecting and checking data; maintaining an audit trail; reflecting on ethical and practical issues; analysing qualitative observations and themes; and presenting the findings. They will gain hands-on experience in pathology museum and laboratory practice, specimen preservation and maintenance, digital documentation, database development, photography/video production and medical education resource development. The students will produce a written research report and a usable digital educational resource, with potential for presentation at an education or pathology meeting.

RELEVANT PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENTS (Education or Research):

Suitable for a students with an interest in pathology, anatomy, communication, ethics or medical history. Previous laboratory, anatomy, pathology, digital communication, ethics or history research experience would be advantageous but is not essential. An ability to work carefully and respectfully with human pathology specimens, attention to detail, and an interest in independent project work are important.

Main supervisor:	Associate Professor Diane Kenwright	
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Other Supervisor/s:		
Host Department:	Department of Pathology and Molecular Medicine	
Location:	Pathology Museum, University of Otago, Wellington	
	Can students work remotely?	No