



Diagnostic cytopathology

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Summary

- Diagnostic cytopathology is the diagnosis of disease at the cellular level. It can be used in two modalities: as a screening test for the early detection of precancerous lesions in asymptomatic individuals, and as a diagnostic test for the identification of cancer cells in symptomatic patients. Whichever modality is used, cytology is seen as a simple, inexpensive, and effective means of detecting neoplastic conditions.
- The biology of tumour growth is complex. Cytologists are better able to interpret cell samples and have a fuller appreciation of diagnostic pitfalls when they understand the basic mechanisms and natural history of cancer development.
- The microscopic interpretation of cells taken from the human body is often not straightforward. Inflammatory disease, cell degeneration, regenerative process, and a bewildering array of benign conditions all represent pitfalls which can entrap the unwary or inexperienced cytologist.
- Cancer patients require the attention of a number of different specialists. In ensuring the best possible care for cancer patients, teams consisting of surgeons, oncologists, pathologists, radiologists, and specialist nurses come together to decide on the best possible care for individual patients. Whenever cytology plays a part in the diagnosis and/or follow-up of cancer patients, the participation of the reporting cytologist in multidisciplinary meetings is essential.