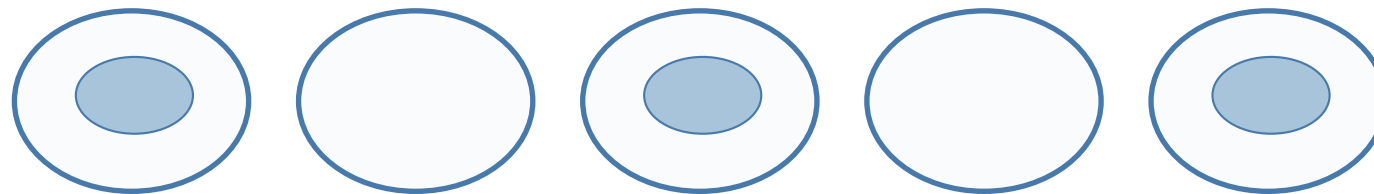


Cryptogenic Organizing Pneumonia

Clinicopathologic diagnosis, morphology and differential interpretation



Dr Abu Suraih Sakhri

MBBS, MD (Pathology)

www.abusuraihsakhri.com

Learning objectives

- Explain how organizing pneumonia differs from a specific etiologic diagnosis.
- Recognize Masson bodies and preservation of the underlying lung architecture.
- Distinguish organizing pneumonia from UIP and NSIP using lesion location and fibrosis.
- Integrate symptoms, consolidation distribution and cause exclusion in diagnostic reasoning.

Organizing pneumonia in the restrictive-disease framework

Broad restrictive context

Diffuse interstitial disease may produce dyspnea, crackles and restrictive physiology.

Fibrosis of alveolar septa is central to some members of this group.

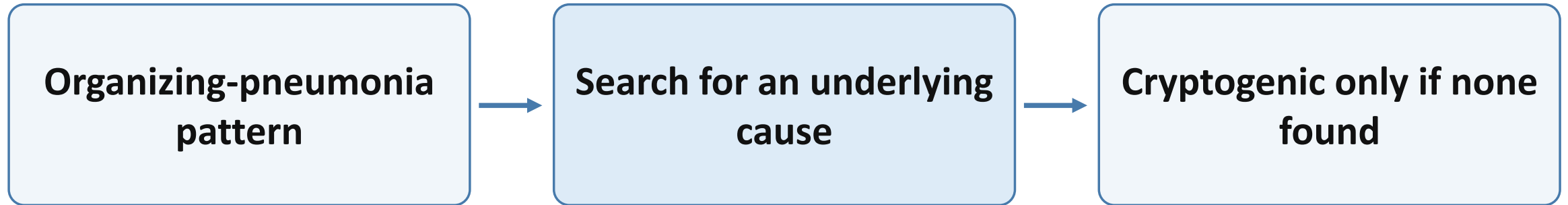
The organizing-pneumonia exception

The defining lesion in organizing pneumonia occupies distal airspaces.

A preserved architecture separates it from destructive fibrosing patterns.

Organizing pneumonia among chronic diffuse interstitial (restrictive) lung disorders.

Two diagnostic levels must remain separate



- An organizing-pneumonia pattern describes the form of tissue injury and repair.
- Cryptogenic organizing pneumonia (COP) names the clinical condition when no cause is identified.
- A histologic pattern alone does not establish that the disease is cryptogenic.

Organizing pneumonia is a response pattern

- The source defines organizing pneumonia as a frequent response to infection or inflammatory lung injury.
- The histologic appearance is therefore nonspecific for the inciting agent.
- Its distinctive morphology helps recognize the response, not uniquely identify its cause.
- Clinical context remains necessary to interpret the lesion.

A descriptive term is not an etiologic conclusion

Organizing pneumonia

Morphologic injury pattern.

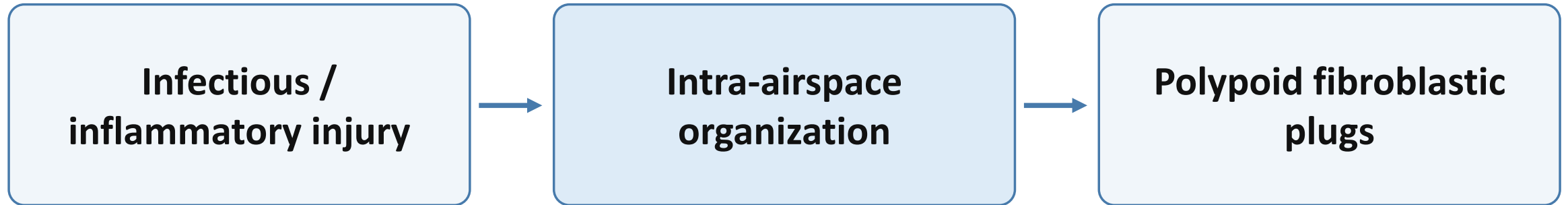
Can accompany an identified infection, drug reaction, toxin, autoimmune disorder or transplant-related process.

Cryptogenic organizing pneumonia

Organizing-pneumonia pattern with no identified etiology.

Requires a clinicopathologic conclusion after evaluation for known associations.

From injury to organization: Conceptual sequence



- The sequence summarizes the word “organizing”; It does not assert a specific molecular pathway.
- Loose connective-tissue plugs form within pre-existing airspaces.
- Underlying lung architecture remains preserved in the characteristic pattern.

The same morphologic endpoint has multiple antecedents

- Viral and bacterial pneumonias are recognized antecedents.
- Inhaled toxins and drugs are additional associations.
- Connective tissue disease and graft-versus-host disease can also produce the pattern.
- Therefore an image showing Masson bodies does not, by itself, diagnose COP.

Etiologic associations in the Robbins passage

Group	Examples or context	Interpretive point
Infectious	Viral and bacterial pneumonias	Search for infectious context
Exposure-related	Inhaled toxins	Correlate with exposure history
Therapeutic	Drugs	Review medication history
Immune-mediated	Connective tissue diseases	Assess systemic disease
Transplant-related	Graft-versus-host disease after HSCT	Check transplant background

Infection-associated organizing pneumonia

- Organizing pneumonia can follow viral or bacterial pneumonia.
- The presence of an organizing pattern does not prove persistent infection.
- Conversely, recognizable organizing pneumonia should not erase a documented infectious antecedent.
- Such a setting supports a secondary, not automatically cryptogenic, classification.

Inhaled toxins are a relevant clinical clue

- The Robbins section identifies inhaled toxins as an association.
- The microscopic pattern remains organizing pneumonia regardless of the implicated exposure.
- An exposure history is therefore part of etiologic interpretation.
- No specific toxin, dose threshold or characteristic stain is supplied in the passage.

Drug-associated organizing pneumonia

- The Robbins passage includes medications among possible antecedents.
- Biopsy morphology alone cannot identify the responsible medication.
- Clinical correlation should establish timing and plausibility.
- Drug-associated organizing pneumonia should not be labelled cryptogenic merely because the histology is characteristic.

Connective tissue disease-associated organizing pneumonia

- Connective tissue disease is an established association with the organizing-pneumonia pattern.
- The surrounding Robbins section lists organizing pneumonia among patterns of autoimmune pulmonary involvement.
- The underlying systemic disorder affects interpretation and prognosis.
- This illustrates why identical airspace plugs need not represent identical disease entities.

Graft-versus-host disease is a distinct setting

- The source identifies graft-versus-host disease in recipients of hematopoietic stem-cell transplants.
- Transplant history becomes essential etiologic information.
- The organizing pattern still requires recognition on histology.
- An established transplant-associated condition argues against a cryptogenic label.

When is the label “cryptogenic” defensible?



- First establish an organizing-pneumonia pattern by appropriate clinicopathologic evidence.
- Then evaluate for recognized causes and associated conditions.
- Only absent an identified etiology does Robbins permit the term COP.

Clinical presentation: Cough and dyspnea

- Cough and dyspnea are the symptoms explicitly reported in the Robbins passage.
- Both symptoms are shared by many pulmonary diseases.
- They should trigger imaging and clinical evaluation, not a specific histologic diagnosis.
- Clinical findings require interpretation alongside consolidation and tissue architecture.

Symptoms can be nonspecific while morphology is distinctive

At the bedside

Cough and dyspnea occur in COP.

Neither is independently diagnostic of an organizing-pneumonia lesion.

Under the microscope

Masson bodies occupy alveolar ducts and alveoli, sometimes bronchioles.

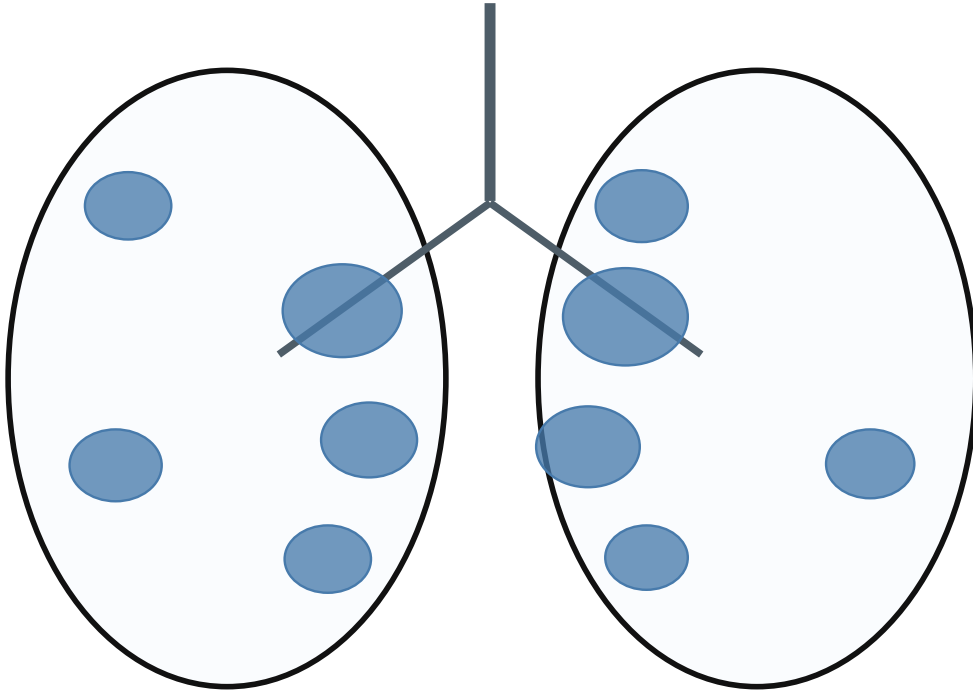
Alveolar walls and global architecture remain relatively preserved.

Link the patient presentation to airspace disease

- The imaging correlate in the source is patchy airspace consolidation.
- This provides a localization clue when the symptoms are nonspecific.
- Airspace distribution helps select a morphologic differential.
- The etiology still cannot be read directly from the distribution.

Radiology: Patchy airspace consolidation

Distribution schematic — not a CT image

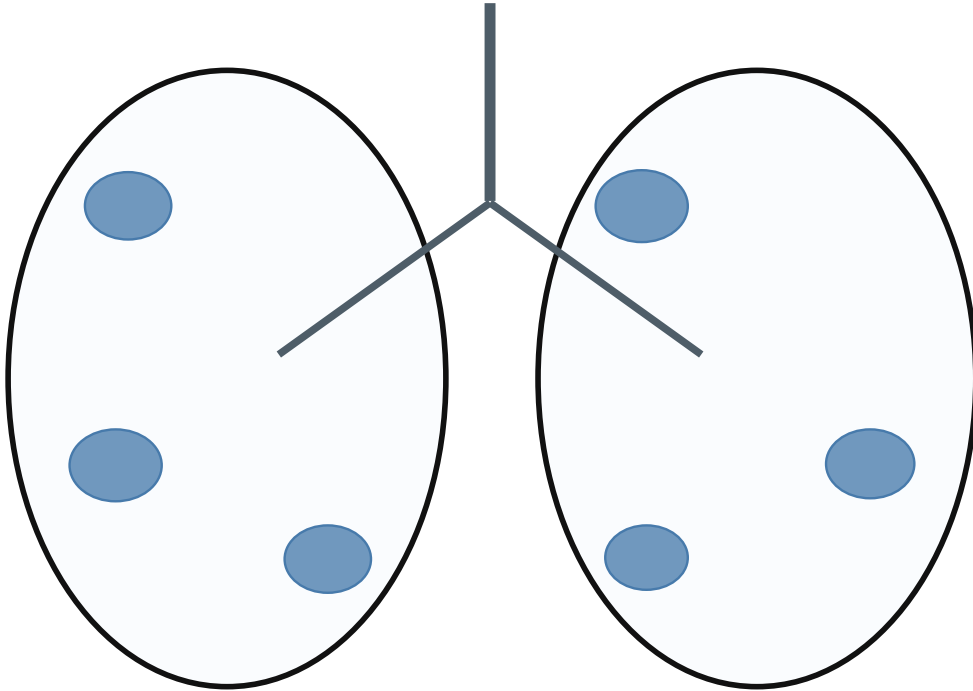


Patchy blue regions = conceptual airspace consolidation

- Patchy subpleural or peribronchial consolidation is the characteristic distribution.
- “Patchy” describes a nonuniform spatial distribution.
- “Airspace consolidation” identifies filled airspaces rather than diagnostic interstitial scarring.

Subpleural localization

Distribution schematic — not a CT image

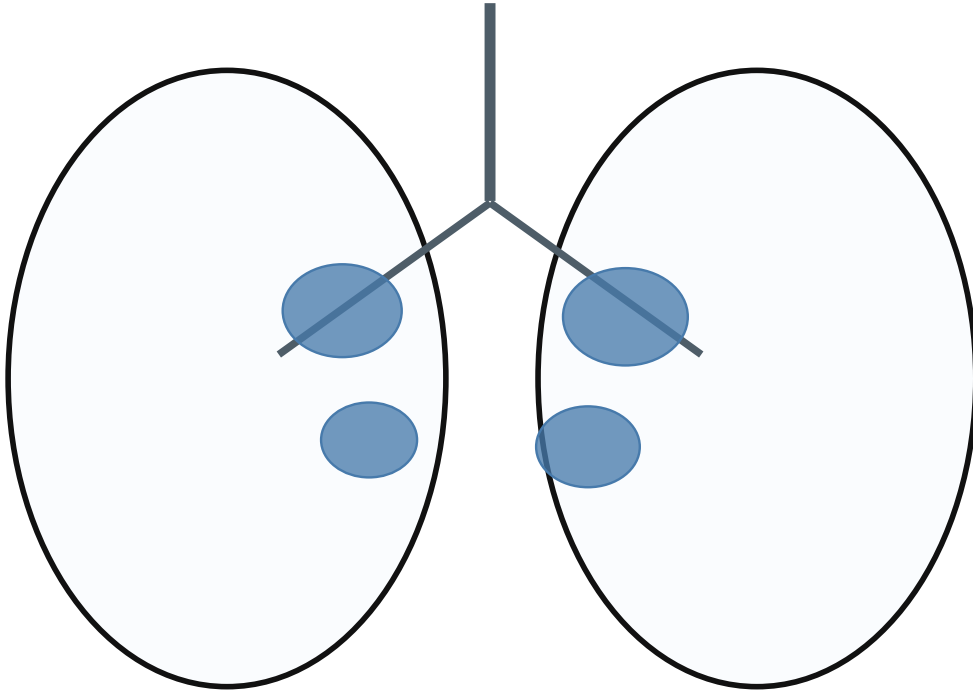


Patchy blue regions = conceptual airspace consolidation

- Subpleural means that some consolidation lies close to the pleural surface.
- The key information is lesion distribution, not a specific cause.
- This peripheral location is compatible with the organizing-pneumonia imaging description.

Peribronchial localization

Distribution schematic — not a CT image



Patchy blue regions = conceptual airspace consolidation

- Peribronchial denotes lesions clustered around airways.
- This complements the subpleural distribution in the source.
- The anatomic relationship is relevant because plugs may involve bronchioles and alveolar ducts.

Airspace filling versus interstitial fibrosis

Organizing pneumonia

Polypoid material within distal airspaces.

Consolidation is an appropriate radiologic correlate.

Interstitial fibrosing disease

Fibrous remodeling of alveolar septa and architecture.

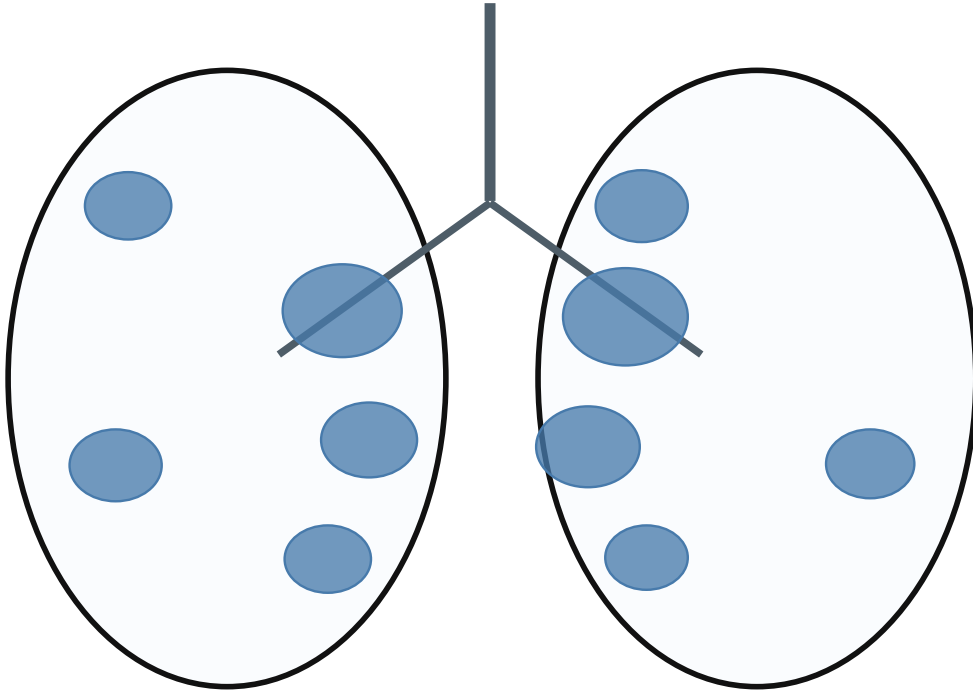
Reticulation and honeycombing figure prominently in UIP.

Imaging has a differential—not etiologic—role

- The source describes subpleural or peribronchial consolidation but does not define a pathognomonic sign.
- Similar consolidation may arise from different diseases.
- An imaging pattern can support an organizing-pneumonia hypothesis.
- Final interpretation still requires clinical history and, where used, tissue findings.

Radiologic and histologic compartments align

Distribution schematic — not a CT image

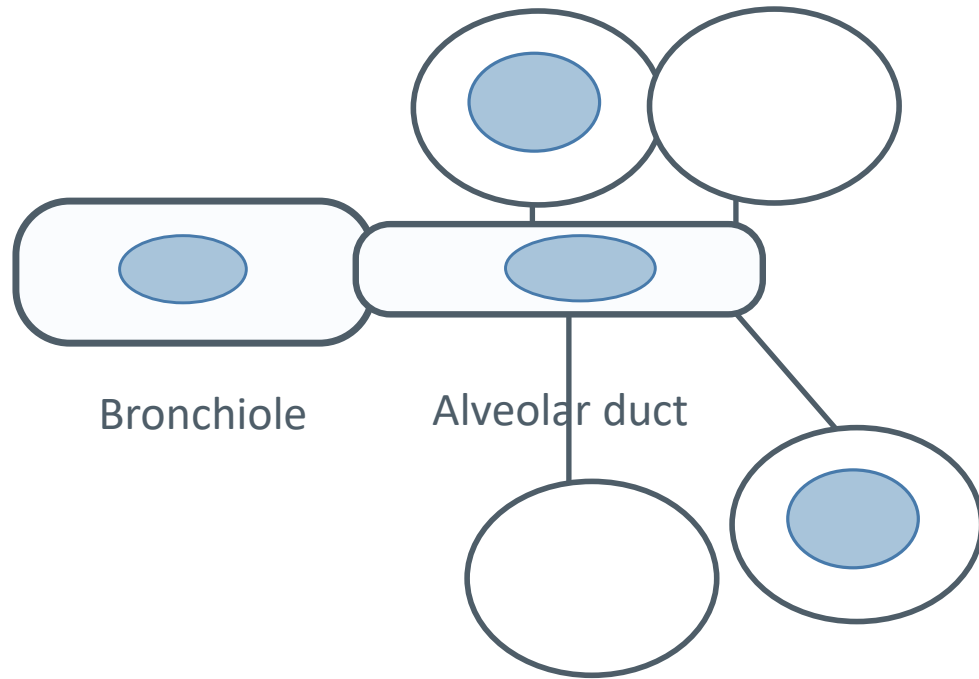


Patchy blue regions = conceptual airspace consolidation

- Consolidated airspaces correspond conceptually to alveolar spaces occupied by organizing connective tissue.
- A subpleural or peribronchial pattern tells the observer where lesions cluster.
- Masson bodies explain what fills those airspaces in the characteristic tissue pattern.

The alveolar–airway units to examine

Schematic — not a histologic specimen

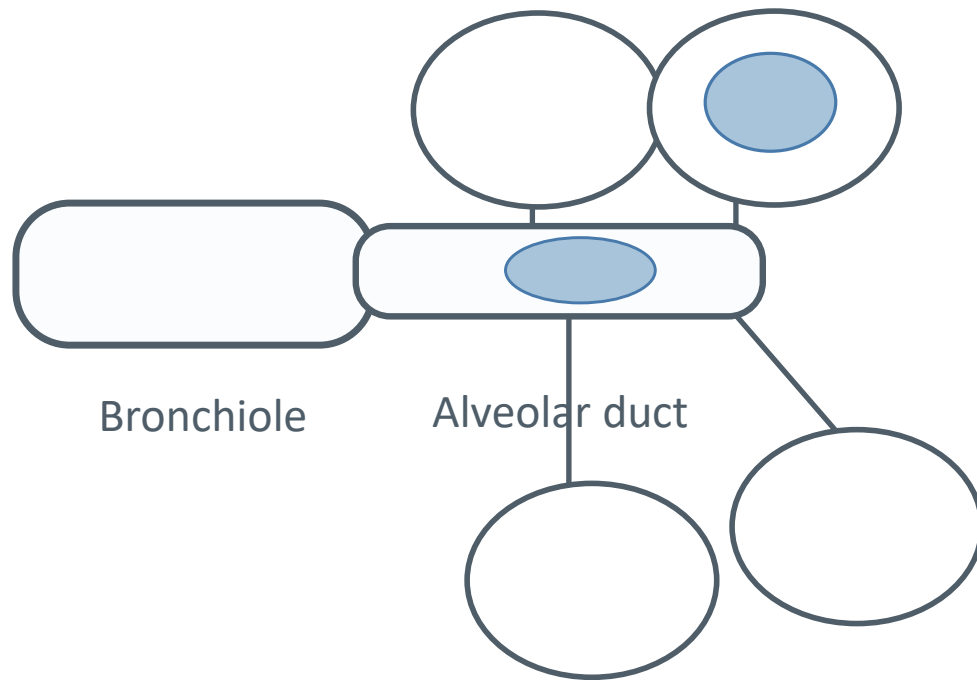


Blue plugs = intraluminal organizing tissue

- Inspect alveoli, alveolar ducts and distal bronchioles separately.
- Robbins explicitly names all three compartments as potential locations of organizing plugs.
- Compartmental localization is more informative than merely saying “fibrosis is present.”

Alveolar ducts contain organizing plugs

Schematic — not a histologic specimen

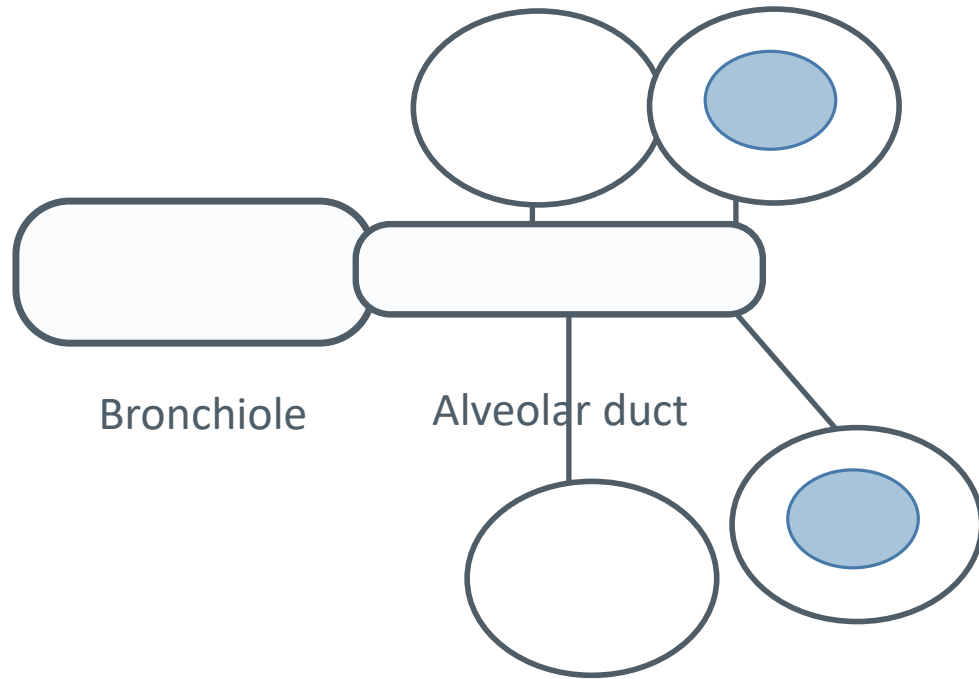


Blue plugs = intraluminal organizing tissue

- An alveolar duct is a distal airway passage bordered by alveolar openings.
- Polypoid plugs within this lumen are characteristic of organizing pneumonia.
- The source specifically includes alveolar ducts in the histologic distribution.

Alveoli can be occupied by Masson bodies

Schematic — not a histologic specimen

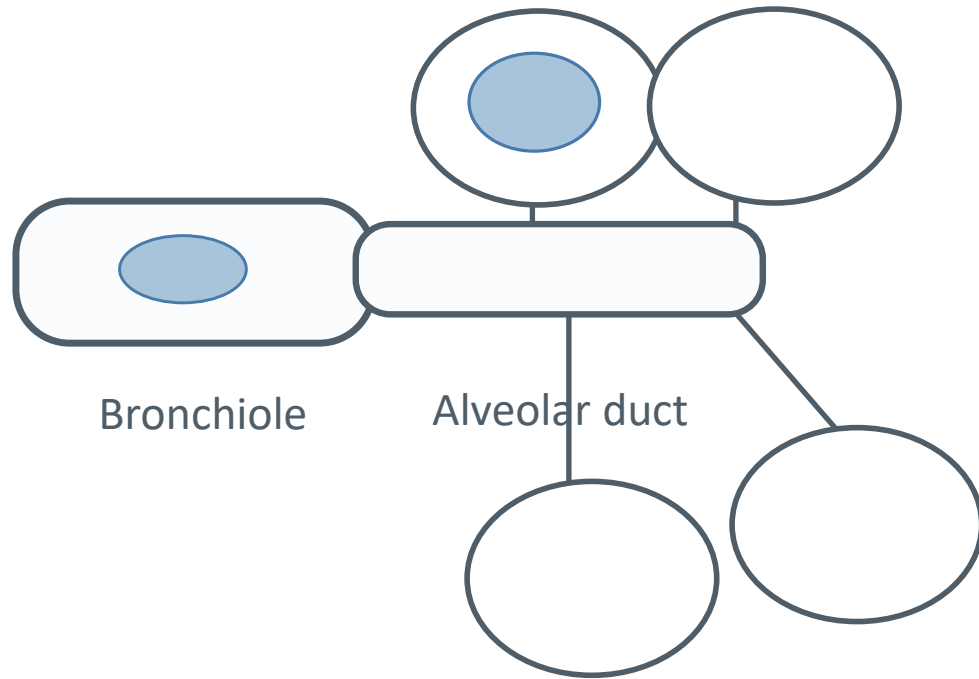


Blue plugs = intraluminal organizing tissue

- Some alveolar spaces are filled by loose organizing connective tissue.
- The native alveolar walls remain relatively normal in the supplied figure description.
- This juxtaposition distinguishes luminal organization from replacement of the septal framework.

Bronchiolar involvement is also possible

Schematic — not a histologic specimen

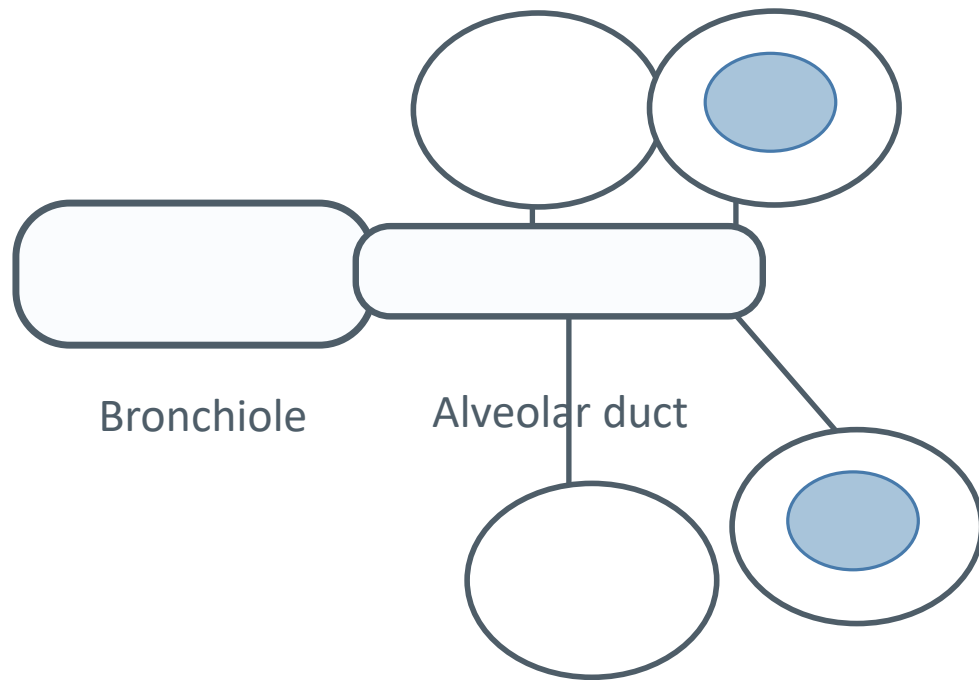


Blue plugs = intraluminal organizing tissue

- The source states that organizing plugs are often found within bronchioles.
- Bronchiolar lesions occur in addition to, rather than instead of, alveolar and ductal lesions.
- Presence across these connected spaces creates a coherent distal-airspace pattern.

Masson bodies are polypoid plugs

Schematic — not a histologic specimen

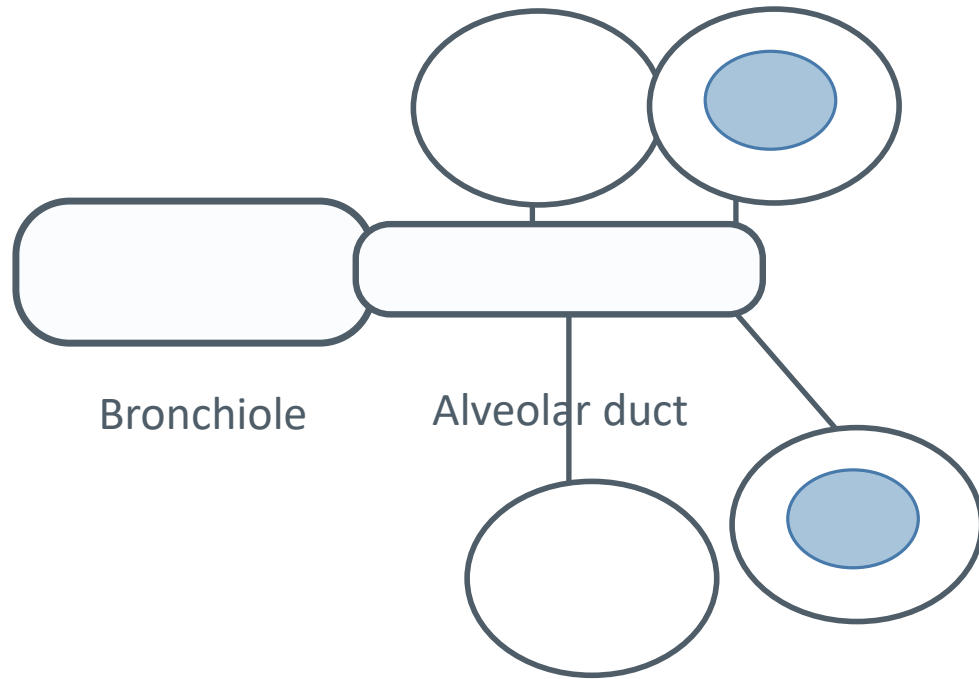


Blue plugs = intraluminal organizing tissue

- Polypoid plugs of loose organizing connective tissue.
- The term “Masson body” denotes the intraluminal fibroblastic plug in this context.
- The named structure is a morphology finding—not proof of idiopathic disease.

The key tissue is loose and organizing

Schematic — not a histologic specimen



Blue plugs = intraluminal organizing tissue

- Masson bodies contain loose organizing connective tissue and fibroblasts.
- They differ from diffuse, dense replacement fibrosis of the alveolar septa.
- The diagnostic emphasis is where connective tissue is growing.

Polypoid growth reflects luminal location

What is seen

A rounded or elongated plug projects into an alveolar or airway lumen.

Several plugs can occupy different neighboring distal airspaces.

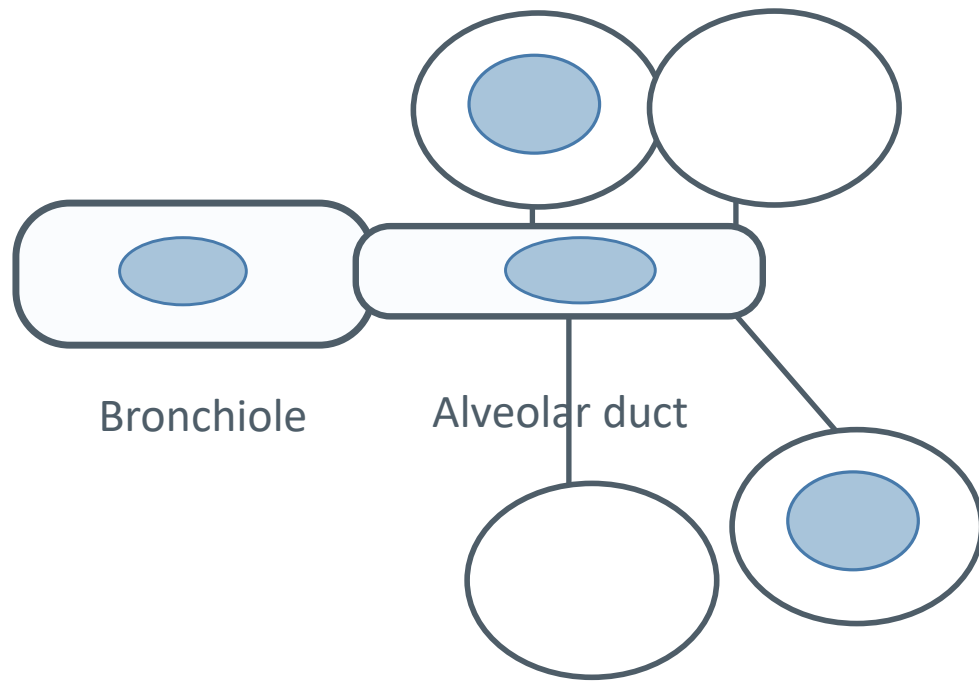
What must remain intact

The surrounding alveolar framework is preserved.

The plug should not be mistaken for honeycomb remodeling or diffuse septal fibrosis.

Read the lesion spatially, not only by cell type

Schematic — not a histologic specimen

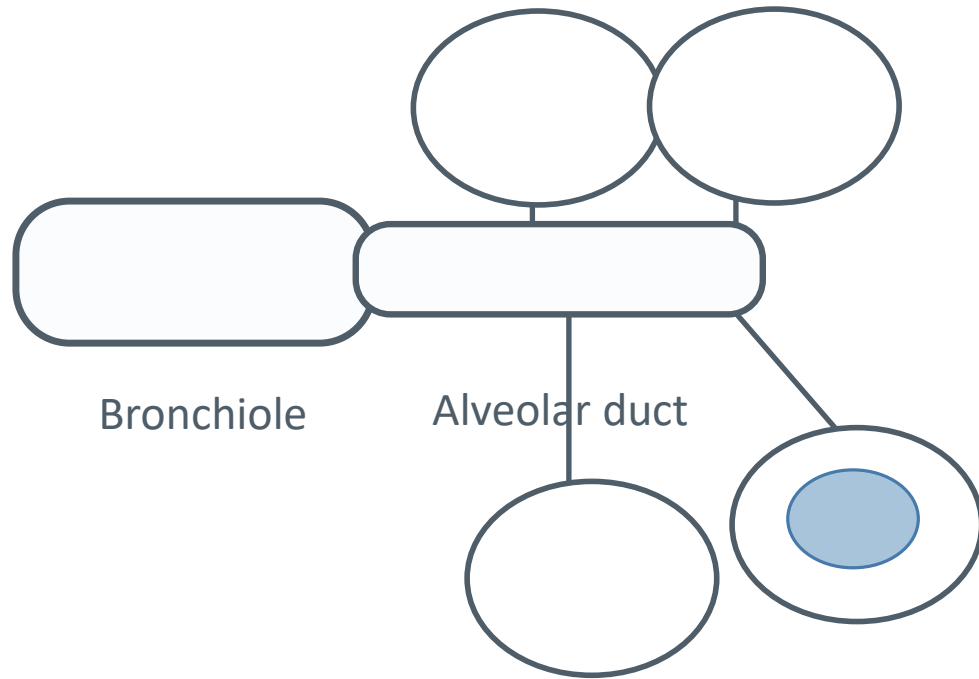


Blue plugs = intraluminal organizing tissue

- Identify the boundary of each alveolus or duct.
- Locate the organizing plug within the pre-existing lumen.
- Compare adjacent walls for preservation rather than architectural destruction.

Preserved architecture is a positive clue

Schematic — not a histologic specimen



Blue plugs = intraluminal organizing tissue

- The Robbins description explicitly states that underlying lung architecture is normal.
- Alveolar walls may surround filled airspaces without being destroyed.
- This is a crucial distinction from chronic destructive fibrosing patterns.

“No interstitial fibrosis” has diagnostic force

Present in classic organizing pneumonia

Loose connective-tissue plugs within distal airspaces.

An otherwise preserved scaffold of alveolar septa.

Not present in the described pattern

Interstitial fibrosis remodeling septal walls.

Architectural loss characteristic of established fibrosing disease.

“No honeycomb lung” narrows the comparison

COP / organizing-pneumonia pattern

Preserved architecture and intraluminal Masson bodies.

The source specifically excludes honeycomb lung.

UIP / IPF comparison

UIP may destroy alveolar architecture and create cystic honeycomb spaces.

Honeycombing argues for a fibrosing process, not uncomplicated classic COP.

Organizing connective tissue is of similar age

- The Robbins COP passage states that its connective tissue is all the same age.
- This contrasts with the coexistence of early and late fibrotic lesions in UIP.
- Uniform maturation does not replace the importance of luminal localization.
- Combine age, architecture and lesion compartment when describing tissue.

Morphologic signature: Location + tissue + architecture

Positive features

Polypoid plugs of organizing connective tissue.

Alveoli and alveolar ducts affected;
Bronchioles often involved.

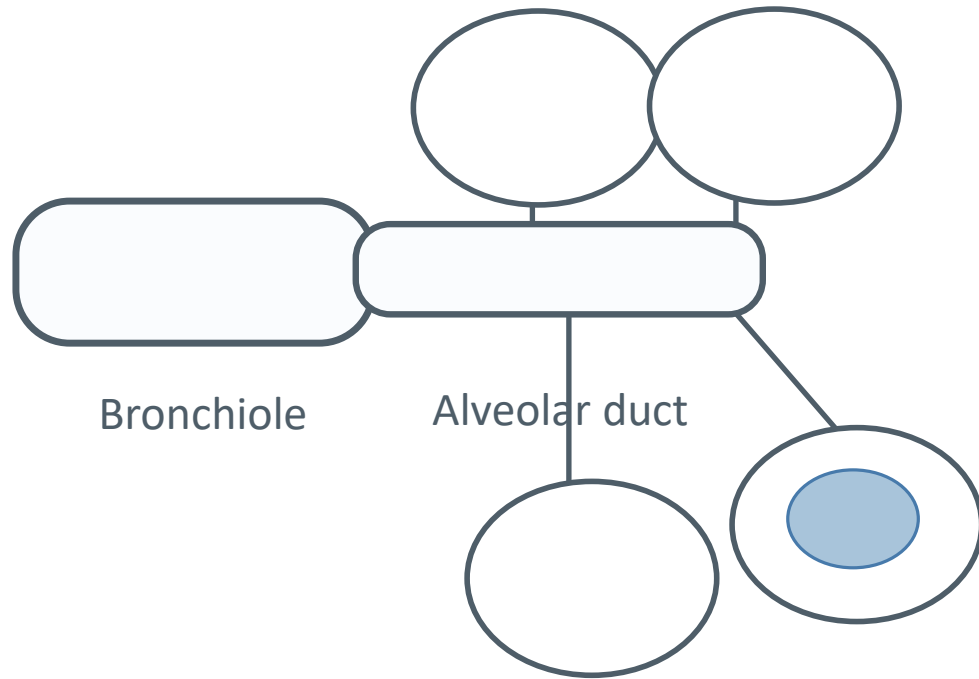
Negative discriminators

Normal underlying lung architecture.

No interstitial fibrosis and no honeycomb lung.

Why alveolar walls matter at low power

Schematic — not a histologic specimen



Blue plugs = intraluminal organizing tissue

- A low-power survey should reveal filled airspaces set within recognizable lung parenchyma.
- At higher power, the organizing material is localized to lumens.
- An intact septal framework supports the organizing-pneumonia pattern.

Organizing pneumonia versus UIP

Feature	Organizing pneumonia	Usual interstitial pneumonia
Dominant location	Airspaces / distal lumens	Alveolar interstitium
Defining lesion	Masson bodies	Patchy fibrosis and fibroblastic foci
Chronology	Connective tissue of similar age	Temporal heterogeneity
Architecture	Preserved	Destroyed in affected zones
Honeycombing	Absent in classic pattern	May be present

UIP has spatial heterogeneity

- Relatively normal regions beside severely fibrotic regions in UIP.
- This uneven interstitial destruction is unlike an airspace plug pattern with preserved architecture.
- At low power, topography often clarifies the differential more rapidly than any isolated spindle cell.
- Assess the entire tissue architecture before assigning a pattern.

UIP has temporal heterogeneity

- Early fibroblastic foci coexist with older dense fibrosis in UIP.
- The COP passage instead describes organizing connective tissue of the same age.
- Chronology and location work together: UIP has interstitial lesions; Organizing pneumonia has luminal plugs.
- The comparison applies to textbook patterns and not every complex mixed biopsy.

Masson body $\neq$ UIP fibroblastic focus

Masson body

Polypoid fibroblastic tissue within airspaces.

Architecture remains recognizable.

UIP fibroblastic focus

Fibroblastic proliferation within an interstitial fibrosing pattern.

Occurs with other spatially and temporally heterogeneous fibrotic lesions.

Organizing pneumonia versus NSIP

Feature	Organizing pneumonia	Nonspecific interstitial pneumonia
Main process	Intra-airspace organization	Interstitial inflammation or fibrosis
Temporal character	Connective tissue described as same age	Fibrosis of roughly uniform age
Characteristic feature	Masson bodies	Interstitial cellular or fibrosing pattern
Architecture	Preserved in classic description	May show interstitial thickening
Honeycombing	Absent	Absent in source description

NSIP can also be temporally homogeneous

- Uniform age alone cannot identify organizing pneumonia.
- Fibrosing NSIP has interstitial lesions of broadly similar age.
- The discriminator is the anatomic compartment: Interstitial fibrosis in NSIP versus plugs in airspaces in organizing pneumonia.
- Therefore ask “Where is the connective tissue?” before “How old is it?”

Three patterns: A spatial diagnostic matrix

Question	Organizing pneumonia	NSIP	UIP
Where?	Airspaces	Interstitialium	Interstitialium
Main lesion	Polypoid plugs	Cellular or fibrosing change	Patchy dense fibrosis / foci
Age pattern	Same age	Roughly uniform	Early and late together
Honeycomb lung	No	No in description	Can occur

Clinical trajectories are not interchangeable

Organizing pneumonia

Some patients recover spontaneously.

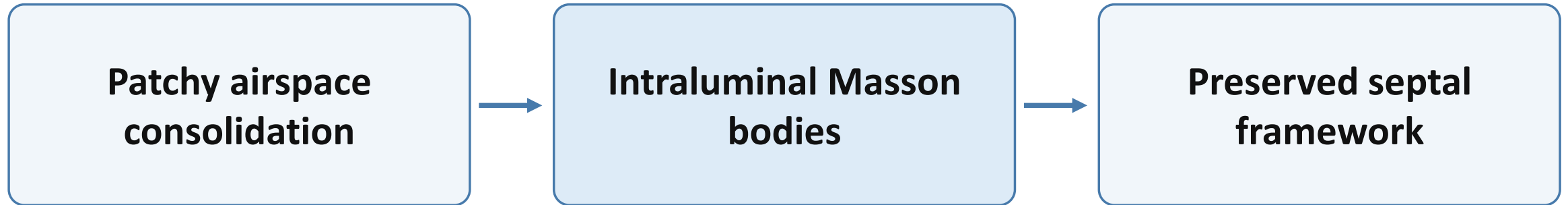
Most require prolonged oral corticosteroids for complete recovery.

UIP / IPF

IPF is characteristically progressive and may cause respiratory failure.

The Robbins paragraph presents a substantially different prognosis and management framework.

The imaging–morphology correlation



- Patchy consolidation is a macroscopic pattern of airspace filling.
- Masson bodies provide the histologic counterpart in organizing pneumonia.
- Preserved architecture explains why the lesion is not automatically equivalent to irreversible septal scar.

Report the histologic pattern precisely

- Describe the polypoid plugs and their location in alveoli, ducts or bronchioles.
- Comment on preservation of architecture and lack of the expected interstitial fibrosis/honeycombing.
- Use “organizing-pneumonia pattern” if etiology remains undecided.
- Reserve “cryptogenic” for the integrated clinical conclusion.

A pattern diagnosis is not the final disease label

Microscopic statement

“Organizing-pneumonia pattern with intra-alveolar Masson bodies.”

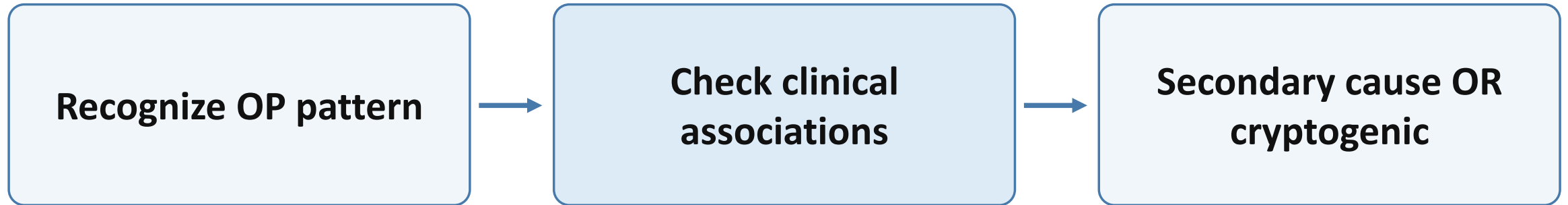
States what the specimen demonstrates.

Clinical synthesis

“Cryptogenic organizing pneumonia” when no cause is identified.

Adds clinical exclusion information not supplied by tissue alone.

Integrated pathway to an etiologic classification



- The source provides a conceptual classification rather than a formal guideline algorithm.
- History of infection, exposures, medications, connective tissue disease and transplantation informs attribution.
- An identified association supports secondary organizing pneumonia.

A recently documented pneumonia changes interpretation

- An organizing-pneumonia pattern can occur in the setting of viral or bacterial pneumonia.
- The preceding illness is relevant even if current biopsy shows fibroblastic plugs rather than acute exudate.
- The label COP should not suppress an established infectious association.
- This distinction is based on context; The source gives no organism-specific morphology.

Autoimmune lung involvement can take many patterns

- NSIP, UIP, organizing pneumonia and bronchiolitis among pulmonary patterns in autoimmune disease.
- A connective tissue disease can therefore coexist with a well-defined organizing-pneumonia histology.
- Disease identity and histologic pattern should be documented separately.
- Prognosis may depend on the underlying systemic disease.

A credible exposure or medication history matters

- Inhaled toxins and drugs are explicitly listed as associated causes.
- The pattern itself does not reveal a particular agent.
- Context and chronology may guide an etiologic classification.
- Robbins does not provide specific exposure limits, drug lists or causality scores in this paragraph.

Spontaneous recovery can occur

- Some patients with COP recover without treatment.
- This contrasts with the inexorably progressive fibrosing pattern typical of IPF.
- The possibility of spontaneous recovery does not make every presentation benign.
- The clinical course must still be interpreted in the context of severity and etiology.

Corticosteroids are commonly effective

- Most patients need oral steroids for complete recovery.
- The passage describes treatment often continuing for six months or longer.
- It does not supply a dose, taper or patient-specific regimen.
- Treatment decisions belong to clinical management rather than morphologic classification alone.

Recovery may require a prolonged course



- The therapeutic information in the source is qualitative, not a response-time estimate.
- Some individuals recover spontaneously; Most need oral corticosteroids.
- A duration of six months or longer may be necessary for complete recovery.

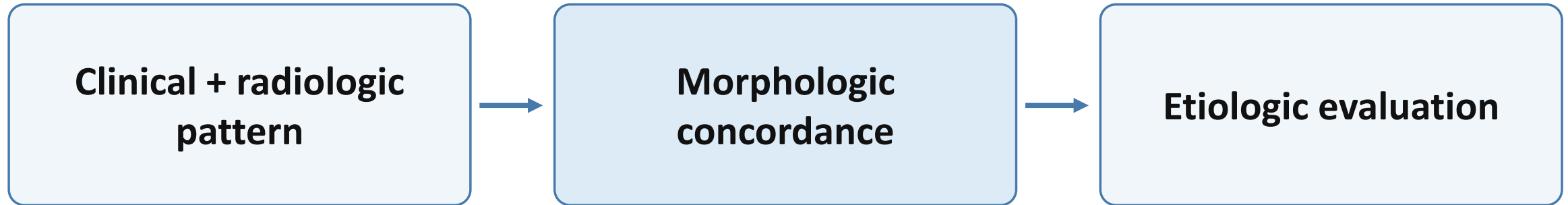
Long-term prognosis depends on the cause

- Robbins explicitly ties long-term prognosis to the underlying disorder.
- This matters particularly for secondary organizing pneumonia.
- The text does not provide survival percentages or relapse rates for COP.
- Prognosis should not be generalized from the histologic pattern alone.

An ARDS-like presentation is possible

- Some patients with an organizing-pneumonia histologic pattern resemble acute ARDS clinically.
- The organizing pattern therefore does not guarantee a mild clinical presentation.
- The text does not identify a separate molecular basis for this acute subset.
- Severe clinical physiology and organizing morphology may coexist.

Clinicopathologic synthesis for suspected COP



- Begin with cough, dyspnea and appropriate airspace-consolidation imaging.
- If tissue is examined, identify Masson bodies and preserved alveolar architecture.
- Finally ask whether a recognized secondary association has been found.

Case 1 — pattern recognition

Clinical vignette

- A patient has cough and dyspnea with patchy peripheral airspace consolidation.
- A lung sample shows polypoid organizing connective-tissue plugs in alveolar ducts and alveoli.
- Alveolar architecture remains recognizable, without honeycombing.

Discussion question

What is the tissue pattern? Is “cryptogenic” already established?

Case 1 — interpret the lesion before the etiology

- The morphologic diagnosis is an organizing-pneumonia pattern with Masson bodies.
- The radiologic and histologic findings are concordant with the Robbins description.
- Cryptogenic status cannot be assigned until associated causes have been evaluated.
- Absence of honeycombing is a useful discriminator from advanced UIP.

Case 2 — an established antecedent

Clinical vignette

- A patient recovering from a documented bacterial pneumonia has persistent patchy consolidation.
- Biopsy shows intraluminal fibroblastic plugs and preserved lung architecture.
- The available clinical history identifies an associated pulmonary infection.

Discussion question

Which label is supported, and which is premature?

Case 2 — do not erase a known cause

- The observed tissue pattern is organizing pneumonia.
- The documented infectious antecedent supports a secondary association.
- The word “cryptogenic” is not justified on the supplied information.
- This is a clinicopathologic classification rather than a unique histologic subtype.

Case 3 — a fibrosing differential

Clinical vignette

- A biopsy shows patchy destruction of alveolar architecture with dense interstitial fibrosis.
- Young fibroblastic foci coexist with older scars and honeycomb-like cystic spaces.
- No predominance of organizing plugs within preserved airspaces is described.

Discussion question

**Which textbook pattern is favored:
Organizing pneumonia
or UIP?**

Case 3 — location and heterogeneity distinguish UIP

- The described combination favors a UIP histologic pattern.
- Interstitial fibrosis, temporal heterogeneity and architectural destruction are the discriminators.
- These findings are not the classic organizing-pneumonia pattern.
- An etiologic diagnosis of IPF would still require clinical exclusion of other causes of UIP.

Case 4 — homogeneity is not enough

Clinical vignette

- A lung specimen contains fibrosing interstitial change of approximately uniform age.
- No Masson bodies or prominent intra-alveolar polypoid plugs are identified.
- An intact luminal organizing-pneumonia pattern is not demonstrated.

Discussion question

What feature prevents classification as classic organizing pneumonia?

Case 4 — distinguish NSIP from organizing pneumonia

- Temporal homogeneity can also occur in fibrosing NSIP.
- The interstitial compartment and absence of Masson bodies move the pattern away from classic organizing pneumonia.
- One isolated descriptor cannot replace assessment of lesion location and architecture.
- Clinical context is still required to attribute the interstitial pattern.

Common interpretive errors

- Calling any Masson-body-containing sample cryptogenic without reviewing context.
- Confusing an intraluminal plug with an interstitial fibroblastic focus.
- Ignoring preserved architecture when differentiating COP from UIP.
- Assuming homogeneous fibrosis is specific for COP rather than checking whether it is interstitial or intraluminal.

Diagnostic summary: What each observation answers

Observation	Question answered	What it cannot establish
Masson bodies	Is an organizing-pneumonia pattern present?	Whether the etiology is cryptogenic
Preserved architecture	Is destructive fibrosis absent in the classic pattern?	The causative disease
Subpleural / peribronchial consolidation	Does imaging fit the described distribution?	A unique histologic diagnosis
Clinical association	Is there a plausible secondary cause?	An exclusive microscopic signature

Core messages for clinical practice

- Organizing pneumonia is an injury-response pattern; COP is the cryptogenic clinical diagnosis.
- Look for Masson bodies in alveoli, ducts and often bronchioles with preserved septal architecture.
- Differentiate from UIP and NSIP chiefly by compartment, architecture and fibrosis.
- Interpret prognosis and treatment in the context of underlying disease and presentation.

Selected textbook reading

- Robbins, Cotran & Kumar. Pathologic Basis of Disease. 11th edition (2026): Cryptogenic Organizing Pneumonia.
- Related reading: Chronic Diffuse Interstitial (Restrictive) Diseases; Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis and Nonspecific Interstitial Pneumonia.
- Anatomical and radiologic diagrams in this lecture are simplified educational schematics, not patient-derived evidence.