

# TECH talk

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## Going to a conference? Make the most of it!

by Teresa Hennessey,  
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You get from a conference what you put into it. The following tips can make the time you spend there a valuable and engaging experience.

- **Keep an open mind.** Choose a conference that will help you meet and add to your personal learning plan.
- **Plan to learn something new.** Don't just attend sessions that are directly related to your current practice setting. Conferences are a great way to expand your knowledge through ideas that may be new to you.
- **Connect with others.** Take advantage of networking opportunities and interact with peers from other organizations. Introduce yourself to others and share where you work. The conversations you have with other delegates may be interesting and informative.
- **Get involved.** Participate in the conference's poster session. This will give you the chance to display your work and share your accomplishments. It's a fun way to enhance your presentation skills.
- **Bring information home.** Make notes of how you can relate the material you have learned directly to your practice. Take information and new ideas back to your manager and co-workers.
- **Provide feedback.** Complete the conference evaluation forms so your input gets to the conference planners. Provide ideas for session topics, speakers and other opportunities you'd like to see in the future.

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## Compounding interest

*Tech has a whale of a time preparing specialty compounds*

**C**apsules for an ailing whale. Anaesthetics for dental patients. Transdermals for cats. These are just a few examples of the compounds that head pharmacy technician Anne Marie Taddeo has prepared in tandem with pharmacist Jennifer Schoenhals at Falls Pharmacy in Niagara Falls, Ontario.

A veteran employee of the 55-year-old, family-owned pharmacy—she started out as a cashier in 1974—Taddeo got involved in specialty compounding when Schoenhals took over the business from her parents. Taddeo and Schoenhals started by taking primary training at the Professional Compounding Centers of America (PCCA) in Houston. “It was four complete days and quite involved,” says Taddeo. “I had never done anything like that before, and it was very challenging and very rewarding. I loved it.” Since then, they continue to keep abreast of new developments by attending regional seminars and reading journals. As PCCA members, they can also view formulas online and confer with PCCA consultants.

Taddeo and two other technicians she has trained spend five afternoons a week, and sometimes mornings as well, in the dedicated on-site compounding lab. “We do a lot of compounds for children, liquids and flavour as well,” she says. “We’ve made antibiotic suppositories for a child who wouldn’t take liquids. We work a lot with HRTs, pain meds. We do a lot of vet compounding. Cats don’t like to swallow liquids, so we have treats and transdermals.” They also compound eyedrops, lip balms, injectables and many other prescription items, including those capsules for the show-stopping whale at Niagara Falls’ Marineland.

To promote their services, Taddeo and Schoenhals conduct “lunch-and-learn” sessions at doctors’ and veterinarians’ offices, as well as host seminars for the public. “Our latest seminar involved a doctor from Burlington who gave a presentation on



bio-identical hormone replacement therapy,” says Taddeo. “We had about 100 people come out. We took that on from scratch, and it evolved into a beautiful and successful event.”

Taddeo has also done presentations at the local college to drum up interest in compounding. “A few years ago, I was involved with another pharmacist who taught compounding at Niagara College,” she says. “I went to do a demonstration on how the capsule machine works and how to make lip balms, just to pique the interest of the students.”

What Taddeo finds the most satisfying about her job is the ability to make life easier for patients. “To hear the patients talk about how their compounded pain medication improves their quality of life is very rewarding,” she says. “To have a child have a better quality of life because of a liquid or transdermal compound that we’ve made—that’s really rewarding to hear. And the parents are so thankful. It’s just very rewarding to hear all that positive feedback.” ◀

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## ▶ ONTARIO NEWS

### Humber conference offers education and answers

With more authority comes more responsibility. Such is the case with the looming regulation of technicians in Ontario. Indeed, with registered techs being accountable to a regulatory body—and with pharmacists relying on them more to support their expanding scope of practice—it's critical for techs to continuously upgrade their education.

The 300-plus who attended the 28th Annual Pharmacy Technicians Conference at Humber College in Toronto were doing just that. At the event, techs from hospital and retail settings converged for a series of educational sessions.

The topics ranged from an opening keynote on drug diversion, to breakout sessions on

insulin pump therapy, med reconciliation and more. With growing demands being placed on a tech's schedule, the closing keynote on finding equilibrium in and out of the pharmacy was certainly appropriate.

The same Ontario bill that has helped clear the way for pharmacists to prescribe certain drugs, also opened the door for remote dispensing. At the conference, Jim Gay, VP, Canadian Pharmacy Regulatory Affairs with Oakville's PharmaTrust, was on hand to clear the air on what the company's drug dispensing kiosks mean for technicians and pharmacists.

The \$50,000 machines are loaded with about 330 medications that could be placed in hospitals and food stores. Patients then insert their prescriptions and connect with a pharmacy through videoconferencing. Gay says with regulation, technicians will perform everything from welcoming patients and recording their medication history and allergies, up until the point when a pharmacist steps in to provide patient consultation. ◀

## ▶ WEST COAST NEWS

### PTSA provides new services to members

True to its mission of providing member services and promoting pharmacy technician professionalism, the Pharmacy Technician Society of Alberta (PTSA) continues to add to its offerings. In addition to the existing job postings, affinity partnerships and other benefits, the society is providing more opportunities for continuing education. The Techs In Touch Continuing Education Event Committee in Calgary, for example, is holding events every month or two, featuring such topics as "Stress and the Pharmacy Technician" and "Infection Control." "PTSA is striving to expand

these committees in the rest of the province, and exploring ideas on how to provide this service to rural areas as well," says President Dena Boxma.

In a related initiative, the PTSA is expanding the capabilities of its website at [www.pharmacytechnicians.ab.ca](http://www.pharmacytechnicians.ab.ca). It is in the process of unveiling a member log-in, which will give members access to an online CE tracker and bi-monthly newsletters.

The PTSA Regulation Committee has also created an e-Chat forum that allows pharmacy technicians to chat with one another via e-mail about regulation/practice-related issues, says Boxma.

Meanwhile, the Conference Planning Committee is busy planning the 2010 Alberta Pharmacy Technician Conference, which will be held September 17-19 in Calgary. Registration opens in May. ◀

## ▶ QUEBEC NEWS

### Pharmacy technicians get up to speed on the common cold

A Quebec-based community pharmacist has created a French-language only training program about the common cold designed specifically for pharmacy technicians. And, it can be given in one hour by any pharmacist.

The goal of the training program is to dispel myths about the various over-the-counter (OTC) cold-symptom relief products for adults, thereby helping techs acquire a better understanding of these products. It was developed by pharmacist Chantal Morissette, a clinical professor at Université Laval's Faculty

of Pharmacy, in collaboration with Pfizer Inc.

The training program presents the various categories of cold-relief products: pain relievers, cough suppressants, expectorants and decongestants.

Morissette wanted to ensure the training addressed the limits of a pharmacy technician's role. For instance, they may not give people advice on OTCs; however, if a patient wants to know the difference between two kinds of cough syrup, a tech should be able to provide an answer. The training also enables techs to identify patients who should speak to the pharmacist.

Pharmacy technicians who are interested in receiving this training should tell their employer. In order to receive the training documents, pharmacy owners must send their name, license number and contact information to Chantal Morissette at [morissettec@sympatico.ca](mailto:morissettec@sympatico.ca). ◀

## Taking stock of inventory management

Pharmacists are looking to technicians to assume increasing responsibility for inventory management; when asked in a previous *Trends & Insights* survey how they'd like to see the role of the technician expand, almost nine out of 10 (88%) cited inventory management.

For techs who take on this task, it can be interesting, challenging and rewarding.

Inventory management involves a variety of duties. According to the Professional Competencies established by the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA), these include: setting order limits and calculating replenishment orders; preparing and placing orders for stock and supplies in compliance with relevant legislation; acquiring, verifying, and storing stock and supplies purchased; investigating and resolving discrepancies; ensuring that receipt and storage of all medications complies with legislative requirements, policies and procedures; identifying, reporting and removing defective, unsafe and recalled products; disposing of, destroying or returning expired, unusable products; reconciling inventory for narcotics and controlled substances; maintaining an inventory system so information can be retrieved easily; and completing all documentation pertaining to inventory management, including narcotics, controlled, special-access and hazardous drugs.

Rosanna Mekler, senior pharmacy technician at GeriatRx Pharmacy in Toronto, which services nursing and retirement homes across Ontario to the tune of about 15,000 scripts per day, estimates she spends 70% of her time on inventory management. That includes checking prices, as well as keeping up to date with Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) formularies and new generic products that come on the market.

An eye for detail is a must. "You need to be very thorough and nitpicky," she says. "You want to keep track of the variances; you want to keep track of what's going out and what's coming in. You can't always rely on the computer systems because they do create errors. You have to be really diligent with your receiving process because even the wholesalers will make mistakes."

Wendy Aubin, who has been responsible for inventory at the North Bay General Hospital in North Bay, Ont., for 10 of the 18 years she has worked there, agrees. "Definitely organizational," she says of the required skills, adding that "with time comes experience,

because I can look at a shelf and say: four is not enough, you need to carry more than that."

As Mekler gained more experience, the pharmacist expanded her responsibilities to liaising with the drug reps. "The better the rapport you have with them, the easier things get, especially when you need rush orders," she says. "Interpersonal skills are very important."

Inventory management also calls for resourcefulness. In the case of back or short orders, for example, Mekler notes that it is her responsibility to suggest alternatives to the pharmacist, always with an eye to gauging the replacement supplier's existing and future inventory, and checking



the ODB formulary to ensure the replacement drug is covered. "So it's all a matter of looking ahead to see what's possible."

Aubin, who has also worked in community pharmacy, notes that inventory management differs in a hospital in that techs are generally dealing with a higher volume of drugs, and more gases, antibiotics, and injectable and intravenous drugs.

"Retail would be a lot different for ordering purposes," she says. "It's more of an as-used type of thing. We have a formulary that we stick to."

Whether in a hospital or community-pharmacy setting, inventory management offers plenty of opportunities for techs to shine. ◀

Illustration: Jennifer Herbert

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