

# TECH talk

JUNE/JULY 2010

## HOW TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS ?

Imagine having the tools to help people solve their lifelong problems, without giving any advice. That's the premise behind the 3-Minute Empowerment Program, developed by numerous doctors and other health professionals.

The theory behind the program, which is sponsored by Pfizer, is that most people already have the answer to their problems, but lack either the understanding that they have a problem (admitting it is always the first step), or the confidence to enact the changes required to meet their desired goal. The program aims to empower the healthcare professional/facilitator/friend by teaching him or her how to ask the proper questions to assess both the person's conviction/confidence, and the stage of change he or she is in (also known as Prochaska stage of behaviour change).

Ultimately, the person asking the questions is meant to simply guide patients to solve a problem themselves, by reaching a solution that fits within their own lives or lifestyles. The entire process aims not only to ease the burden on the facilitator by not requiring him or her to give advice, but also to improve patient outcomes, so both parties will benefit in the end. The guiding rule throughout the process is: "Don't give advice...just ask the right questions." Sure sounds simple, doesn't it?

—Wilson Caetano

*Willson Caetano spoke on this topic to pharmacy technicians at the recent Manitoba Pharmacy Conference*

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## WINNING WAYS

### Tech earns award for commitment to professionalism

**IN THE EYES OF HER COLLEAGUES,** pharmacy technician Colleen Sauve is the epitome of professionalism. So it came as no surprise—especially not to fellow technician Tammy Borle—that Sauve was selected as the first recipient of the new PTSA Professionalism Award.

Sponsored by the Pharmacy Technician Society of Alberta, the award recognizes pharmacy technicians and assistants "for their commitment to professionalism through commitment to pharmacy practice." While the award is based on several selection criteria, it is in "acting as a role model for other pharmacy technicians and assistants" that Sauve really shines. Borle, who nominated her for the honour, says Sauve has been "a really good mentor for me."

When Borle was investigating a career as a pharmacy technician, Rock Folkman, chairperson of the program at Red Deer College, suggested she spend a day with Sauve, who has been a technician at Westlock Healthcare Centre in Westlock, Alta., since 1993. Borle came away impressed and inspired. "It was a terrible day, actually, for me to be there," she explains, "because the computers were down and Colleen was way behind in her work, but she was still so patient and answered all my questions." Sauve continued to encourage Borle in her studies, even offering to help her with her distance-learning program if she had difficulties. When an assistant's position came up at the same pharmacy, Borle jumped at the opportunity to work with Sauve. Upon graduating in 2009, she landed a technician's position there, much to the delight of both parties.

Sauve, on the other hand, has "practically grown up" at Westlock Healthcare Centre, having started in admitting after graduating from high school 29 years ago. Following a stint in the finance department, she sought a new challenge. "I wanted to better myself, and I knew that eventually they would be



**Colleen Sauve is the first recipient of the PTSA Professionalism Award.**

hiring a pharmacy tech at the hospital," she says. "They didn't have one prior to that, and I was very interested in the pharmacy tech program." She took a year's leave of absence to complete the course, and also passed the PTCB (Pharmacy Technician Certification Board) certification exam in 2002.

While the job keeps her hopping—there is only a part-time assistant besides Sauve and Borle to handle 42 acute-care and 150 long-term-care beds—she says she truly enjoys the people she works with. She also likes the variety of duties, which include the preparation of sterile products (her favourite job), taking ward stock, monitoring narcotic and controlled drugs, compounding, purchasing, inventory control, pre-packaging for long-term care, stocking of emergency trays and the night cabinet, and most recently, order entry. She and Borle regularly perform "tech-check-tech" to lighten the workload of the sole pharmacist.

Not surprisingly, given her commitment to the profession, Sauve intends to pursue regulation at the earliest opportunity. But while she believes in the concept, she laments the lack of information about the process, in particular the bridging courses that are due to start this fall.

In the meantime, she is looking forward to the annual Alberta Pharmacy Technician Conference in Calgary in September, where she will receive her award. "I am totally honoured," she says. —Sally Praskey

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## QUEBEC NEWS

### The OPQ wants techs to verify medication container contents

**THIS FALL, THE ORDRE DES PHARMACIENS DU QUÉBEC (OPQ)** will publish a new standard for delegating medication container content verification to pharmacy technicians. It will replace the November 2005 standard.

The OPQ, in turn, hopes that community pharmacists will follow suit by entrusting technicians with this task. "We have already obtained a legal opinion stating that medication container verification is a technical task that can be delegated," says Manon Lambert, OPQ Director-General.

In early 2000, the OPQ was unsuccessful in convincing community pharmacists to delegate this task to techs because of liability worries on the part of pharmacists. But the OPQ believes that the tide has turned. "Over time, we've seen pharmacists become more open to the idea," says Lambert. "They are willing to free themselves from more technical duties to focus on tasks they alone can do to advance society, such as drug therapy monitoring."

On the other hand, pharmacists say that they do not have to entrust this task to

reluctant techs. "After all, people will need to feel at ease and confident with the change. Although this will be a team decision, certain conditions must be met for this idea to become a reality—namely the implementation of policies, procedures and tech training programs," says Lambert.

Community pharmacies will not be left to fend for themselves. "We aim to provide a framework that ensures that the delegation is done safely, first for the patient and second from a professional responsibility standpoint," says Lambert. Each pharmacy will be responsible for delegating the on-site verification of container contents—in accordance with the OPQ standard.

Full details, including application procedures and tools to facilitate implementation, will be released this fall. "We do not expect all community pharmacies to start delegating the verification of container contents shortly after we publish our standard. Nevertheless, we hope it generates a team discussion in these times of scarce human resources," says Lambert. —Éric Whittom

## WEST COAST NEWS

### Manitoba Pharmacy Conference tops with techs

**FOR THE SECOND CONSECUTIVE YEAR,** the Canadian Association of Pharmacy Technicians (CAPT) took part in the Manitoba Pharmacy Conference, held in April. Titled "A Changing Climate: Emerging Opportunities," the three-day event featured speakers who addressed key issues for pharmacists, technicians and the profession as a whole.

An entire day was committed to professional development for pharmacy technicians and it kicked off with a presentation by pharmacist Willson Caetano, who provided techs with a universal intervention tool that is part of a short, three-minute empowerment process (see sidebar on previous page). Another session featured nurse Valerie Frey, speaking on insulin pump application to help improve the quality of life for type 1 diabetes patients. The seminar focused on what pharmacy technicians need to know in dealing with all products relative to insulin pumps, and included interactive, hands-on training on blood glucose monitors targeted towards patients on rapid-acting insulin.

Speaker and pharmacist Marian Kremers discussed how to build and maintain strong, healthy bones. She provided an overview of osteoporosis, including information for pharmacy technicians on what it is, how it is diagnosed, how to assess and reduce risk through nutrition and physical activity, and drug treat-



Back: Debra Chartier, Rose Dick, Prital Shah  
Front: Mary Bozoian, Jackie Abraham

ments available for the disease.

Manitoba's Regional Educational Outreach Committee is already looking ahead to next year to make the conference even bigger and better.

If you want further conference information or wish to find out more about future CAPT events, such as PDC 2010, please visit [www.capt.ca](http://www.capt.ca). —Jackie Abraham

Jackie Abraham is an instructor at Herzing College in Winnipeg, and a Manitoba CAPT representative

## Helping patients get a grip on arthritis

### LIVE LONG ENOUGH AND MOST PEOPLE

can count on developing some type of arthritis—at the very least, a touch of osteoarthritis, says the Arthritis Society of Canada. Arthritis actually consists of more than 100 different conditions—anything from relatively mild forms of tendonitis and bursitis to crippling systemic forms, such as rheumatoid arthritis (RA).

Arthritis is not just a disease of the elderly—children can get juvenile arthritis—but an aging population means the pharmacy team will inevitably have a role to play in the management of this chronic disease.

A key role for pharmacy technicians is assisting patients with adherence, says Catherine Biggs, clinical pharmacist at Homecare North in Edmonton, Alta.

“Because the meds are to be taken for life, adherence is huge, not just with medication, but also with testing,” she notes. For example, when patients are on methotrexate, commonly used to treat RA, they need to have blood work done regularly to test for all types of anaemia, she explains. So techs can help by supporting the patient in going for continual testing. If a patient is late picking up refills, the tech can also stress the importance of remaining on the medication and going for the monitoring.

At Specialty Care Pharmacy (SCP) in Oakville, Ont., which specializes in dispensing biologic and other specialized medications for several therapeutic areas, including arthritis, the techs are involved in calling patients when they are due for refills, says Heather Hadden, manager of education and patient adherence. “Another role the techs here at SCP have is to run a late list—if the patient is late for their scheduled dose, then a pharmacist is notified, who follows up with the patient,” she adds. “As well, if a patient has cancelled their infusion and not rebooked it, the technician alerts the pharmacist, and the pharmacist follows up.” Hadden says SCP also trains the technicians to deal with the doctors’ offices or clinics that treat patients with RA. “Thus the technician would have to do an overview and self-assessment test on the basics of such drugs as Remicade, Enbrel, Humira, Orencia, Simponi, and Rituxan,” all of which may be administered in the treatment of RA.

Another important task for technicians is helping patients secure drug benefits, says Hadden. In Ontario, many of these medications are only Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB)/Trillium with an Exceptional Access Program (EAP), she explains. “The technicians are in charge of helping the patient obtain Trillium, working with them to secure an EAP, and advising MDs when the EAP is going to run

out so that their treatment is not interrupted,” she says. “We also work closely with the support programs to see that the patient has some financial assistance with co-pays or with ODB/Trillium deductibles. That is a very important role that the techs have to help with adherence.”

Technicians can also make patients with more advanced disease aware of homecare aids, such as braces and assistive devices, suggests Biggs. Even if their own pharmacy doesn’t carry these products, techs can refer patients to specialty stores that do.

Techs who want to bone up on the basics can go to the Arthritis Society of Canada website ([www.arthritis.ca](http://www.arthritis.ca)). It has a variety of online presentations, print publications and other



istockphoto

useful nuggets of information. Biggs recommends techs attend a free, two-hour interactive workshop called “Arthritis 101” that the Society offers regularly in various locations.

By increasing their knowledge of arthritis, technicians will add value to the pharmacy team and help patients get a grip on this debilitating disease. —Sally Praskey

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to your professional development.



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Source: Teva & Inaghta (2007), Tech Talk readership survey (2008), private research (2008)