

# TECH talk

JUNE 2013

NEWS

## ACP appoints first tech to Competence Committee

**TERESA HENNESSEY IS THE FIRST** pharmacy technician to be appointed to the Competence Committee of the Alberta College of Pharmacists (ACP).

After fulfilling her term as one of the first pharmacy technician observers on Council, Hennessey was named to the Committee to continue to advise on policy development as a representative of pharmacy technicians.

The Health Professions Act under the Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians Profession Regulation requires ACP to have a Competence Committee. This group of volunteers, comprising Hennessey, pharmacists, and a faculty appointee, makes recommendations such as requirements for continuing competence and the assessment of those requirements, requirements for ongoing registration, strategies to support the continuing professional development of regulated members, and methods to assess the competence of regulated members.

As a Committee member, Hennessey, who is a pharmacy operations manager at corrections healthcare, for Alberta Health Services, says she will participate in discussions and decisions related to the development and management of the competence programs for both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. "Currently, the Committee is reviewing the overarching principles and rules of the competence program, and will be making recommendations for how the pharmacy technician competence program will be introduced," she notes.

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## FINDING FULFILLMENT IN HOSPITAL PHARMACY

**AFTER 23 YEARS WORKING IN A COMMUNITY** hospital in British Columbia, Melanie Eaton was looking for a new challenge.

She found it in the Psychosis Treatment Optimization Program (PTOP), Mental Health and Substance Use Services, as a clinical pharmacy technician.

In July 2011, Eaton applied for what was then a temporary position in a pilot program for the Fraser Health Authority in Langley, BC. The following year, she reapplied when the job became permanent. She's never looked back.

The PTO—currently the only one of its kind in Canada—is a mental health program for people who have not responded well to previous treatments for their psychosis. Many of the approximately 220 patients in the program are taking the drug clozapine and it is Eaton's responsibility to monitor their lab results and alert the clinicians to any cases of low white blood cell counts. She makes case notes on any of the alerts, and monitors clozapine serum levels. "If they're too high, I bring it to the pharmacist's attention," she explains.

Eaton also sets up interviews for clients with the clinical pharmacy specialist while doing medication reconciliations. She maintains a spreadsheet of each client's medications and a record of their defined daily doses. She reviews their medications again at one-, three-, six-, and 12-month intervals, after which most patients complete the program.

In addition, Eaton assists the community pharmacist with medication management at community mental health sites, clearing out expired medications, explaining how to keep vaccines stable, and offering other assistance.

Other duties include completing Health Canada special access requests and pharmacare special authority requests for the physicians, arranging for hematologist consults with the physicians, developing clinical practice guidelines for the community mental health centres, and helping plan the annual conference. She particularly appreciated the opportunity to develop a patient handout on hypersalivation with clozapine, which gave her a chance to exercise her creativity.

"[The addition of] Melanie to the clinical team



has not only allowed us to increase capacity, but her expertise and training have provided support, permitting us to meet and exceed the challenges of a busy mental health and substance use program," says Dr. Deborah Thompson, one of two clinical pharmacists in the program.

"As a team, we identify issues and discuss options/actions," adds clinical pharmacist Dr. Peter Lam. "A clinical pharmacy tech adds their own insight and experience to the process, helping us achieve greater efficiencies."

Given her many responsibilities, it is not surprising that Eaton cites "time" as her biggest challenge. That said, "it's really fun to be in a new program," she says. "When you come across a challenge, you find a way to work around it." She cites the positive impact on her mental health clients as the most satisfying part of her job.

Although she was many years into her career when regulation became an option, Eaton jumped at the opportunity to take on another challenge, and earned her RPhT designation in 2012. "For me, becoming regulated was something that made me feel more responsible."

As for the future, Eaton will continue to grow with the job. "The job changes almost every day. We work together to improve our services all the time .... We're so enthusiastic and want to make [our program] the best."

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## NEWS

### BC reduces registration fees for technicians

#### PHARMACY TECHNICIANS IN BRITISH

Columbia will soon enjoy lower registration fees, thanks to a recent decision by the board of the College of Pharmacists of British Columbia.

The College had previously announced a reduction in the full pharmacist registration fee to \$530 (down from \$630, plus applicable taxes), and will now offer an equivalent decrease in the fees for pharmacy technicians.

Annual fees for pharmacy technicians will remain at two-thirds of the full pharmacist

fee, or approximately \$350. The current registration fee for pharmacy technicians in the province is \$441, including GST.

"These various changes have been brought into place as the College felt that some financial room created an opportunity to both reduce and streamline our fee structure," says Jon Chen, the College's communications specialist.

The reductions are expected to be in force later this year, after the fee schedules are formally entrenched into bylaw.

### SCP conducts survey on technician regulation

#### THE SASKATCHEWAN COLLEGE OF

Pharmacists (SCP) has published the results of a survey to determine the impact of pharmacy technician regulation.

Results of the 2012 survey showed that 79% of the pharmacy assistants responding were in favour of pharmacy technician regulation, compared with 82% of pharmacists.

Of the pharmacists surveyed, 60% said they would pay for the bridging courses, 64% would pay for the PEBC exams, 69% would provide time off (without pay) to complete the education, 76% would increase the pay rate, and 86% would delegate more responsibilities to the regulated technicians.

Both pharmacy manager/owner and assistant respondents indicated the most appropriate pay increase range for regulated technicians was \$0–\$5.00/hour. However, 64% of pharmacy managers cited this range, compared with only 38% of assistants. Twenty-eight per cent of pharmacist respondents chose an increase of \$5–\$9.99/hour, versus 35% of assistants who chose an increase of \$10–\$14.99/hour.

According to its 2012 Annual Report, the SCP has approved a package of amendments, including regulation of pharmacy technicians, to the 1996 Pharmacy Act for submission to the Ministry of Health.

#### BY THE NUMBERS

The College of Pharmacists of British Columbia recently circulated a survey to pharmacy technicians across the province with the goal of better understanding some of the unique issues they face. Nearly one-third of the province's 328 registered pharmacy technicians (as of March 25, 2013) responded. Below are some of the results from the April 2013 Engagement Report.

In my practice/pharmacy I am the only registered pharmacy technician.

Yes: 42% No: 58%

In my practice/pharmacy I know of pharmacy assistants who have decided not to pursue regulation.

Yes: 89% No: 11%

I was required by my employer to complete the pharmacy technician regulation process as a result of a changing job requirement.

Yes: 40% No: 60%

I was financially supported by a third party to become a regulated technician.

Yes: 69% No: 31%

I have found that there is confusion over the scope of practice of a pharmacy technician.

Yes: 85% No: 15%

I have found additional opportunities for growth in my chosen field by choosing to register as a technician.

Yes: 51% No: 49%

I have taken at least one Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition exam.

Yes: 57% No: 43%

Pharmacists respect and appreciate that my work allows them to expand into other areas of practice that they may not have had the time or resources to pursue.

Yes: 58%

No: 42%

I have found that other health professionals are unaware that as a registered pharmacy technician, I am regulated under the Health Professions Act, just as they are.

Yes: 80% No: 20%

I would recommend regulation as something worth pursuing.

Yes: 81% No: 19%

## Techs talk alternative career paths

### WHILE WORKING IN A COMMUNITY

or hospital pharmacy is a rewarding career, there are many other options for technicians.

That was the message Bal Dhillon, Robert Solek, and Karen Shelton delivered at the recent Canadian Association of Pharmacy Technicians (CAPT) Professional Development Conference, in a session titled "Alternative Career Paths for Pharmacy Technicians."

Dhillon, who recently earned her RPhT and also holds a BSc in Biology from Simon Fraser University, has been manager of the Pharmacy Drug Distribution Centre (PDDC), Lower Mainland Pharmacy Services (LMPS), in Langley, BC, since 2006. Before that, she was the pharmacy technician supervisor at Royal Columbian Hospital—the first to hold that position in Fraser Health (FH). "Since then, all FH sites have had a technician in a supervisor capacity," she says. She also has seven years' experience in retail pharmacy.

The enterprising Dhillon landed her current position when she responded to a job posting during the construction of the PDDC, a 17,500-square-foot pharmacy within the LMPS. In this capacity, she oversees the development and implementation of drug distribution services from PDDC to LMPS—some 55,000 orders a day—and manages a staff of more than 50, including pharmacy assistants and technicians.

While the job brings many challenges—including staffing shortages and budget constraints—Dhillon finds it extremely rewarding. "It's a very exciting, adapting role," she says. "Every day brings a different learning experience."

Since 2011, Robert Solek has been on-site pharmacy/MS&E auditor in the Business Integrity Department at the Mississauga-based Express Scripts Canada, a provider of health benefits management services. In this capacity, he conducts on-site audits to ensure that providers have retained the appropriate documentation in support of each claim.

Previously, Solek worked as a pharmacy technician in clinical trials at Toronto Western Hospital. There, he performed order entry; prepared and dispensed trial medications; prepared intravenous, chemotherapy, and viral products; and maintained inventory. He was fortunate enough to get time off to volunteer as a retail technician at the 2010 Olympics in Whistler, dispensing medication to athletes, coaches, and other delegates from around the world.

He subsequently worked as a pharmacy purchaser at Toronto General Hospital, purchasing medication and supplies for packaging machines, as well as compound-

ing (sterile and non-sterile items). He was also responsible for coordinating interhospital transfers, maintaining inventory control, and monitoring temperatures for fridges and freezers that stored vaccines and antidotes.

Karen Shelton's career took a different direction when she became pharmacy technician program director/instructor at Thompson Career College in Kamloops, BC, in 2004. The College became accredited this year.

Shelton began as a technician at hospitals in Calgary and Kamloops. She left her job in 2004 to nurse her husband back to health following a serious car accident. At the urging of a friend, she applied for an instructor's position at the College, and was hired immediately. "I have never looked back and have never been happier," she enthuses. Her responsibilities include planning and organizing

instruction for classroom and labs, evaluating student performance, and coordinating practicum placements. Shelton started the Provincial Instructors Diploma Program soon after joining the College faculty, and is now completing the bridging requirements for her RPhT designation. She is also the BC representative for the Canadian Pharmacy Technician Educators Association (CPTEA).

Dhillon notes that there are many more career possibilities for technicians today. She cites clinical technician, automation technician, medication use management technician, and pharmaceutical purchaser as just a few examples. "Since the role of the pharmacist is changing to [involve] more direct patient care, the demand for innovative technology is increasing, creating vast opportunities for technicians."



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