

TECH talk

APRIL/MAY 2011

REGULATED TECHS ASSIGNED GREATER ROLE, STUDY SHOWS

With tech regulation now underway in Canada, many techs are debating whether to devote the time and money to pursuing regulation and retaining the 'pharmacy technician' title. However, a recent U.S. study found that regulation can play a significant role in determining whether a technician is given expanded responsibilities in the dispensary.

The cross-sectional study asked 456 techs to characterize their personal, educational and experiential backgrounds, pharmacy location and the tasks they performed there. Researchers then applied a regression model to determine if any of those factors predicted if a tech was assigned roles traditionally performed by the pharmacist.

Researchers found that certified techs were more likely given tasks beyond dispensing, like compounding topical preparations and requesting refill authorizations. However, the biggest determinant of roles was the pharmacy location, with techs in smaller independent pharmacies more likely to get extra duties.

"Pharmacy technicians are able to take on a larger role in pharmacy practice," says study author Dr. Daniel Friesner. "However, technicians' abilities to fill these expanded roles depend on various factors, including practice setting, acceptance by pharmacists and technician experience."

Friesner believes that regulation should be a requirement for all pharmacy technicians. "If you do not make it an 'all or nothing' regulation, it is possible that you will have two classes of technicians, with different wages, roles and functions," he says. "That could lead to friction in the work environment and confusion about what personnel can perform what tasks."

The study was published in the December 2010/January 2011 issue of the *Journal of the American Pharmacists Association*.

FREE CCEP-ACCREDITED CE INSIDE:

Ethical Principles for Pharmacy Technicians

Accredited by the Canadian Council on Continuing Education in Pharmacy



Answer this CE online for instant results. Visit www.CanadianHealthcareNetwork.ca

FINDING FULFILLMENT IN DIABETES EDUCATION

Tech helps diabetes patients get—and stay—on track

WHEN JUANITA POIRIER'S SON JONATHAN

was diagnosed with diabetes 10 years ago at the age of four, she set out to learn as much as she could about the disease. In the process, the technician at Walmart Pharmacy in Moncton, N.B., became an invaluable member of the pharmacy team and a lifeline to many diabetes patients.

Poirier estimates she spends about 10-15% of her time working with diabetes patients. For example, she helps them choose a glucose meter, explaining what it does and how to use it, and the best times to check their blood sugar. "I usually do a practice run with them, so they know how to use the device," she says. She also provides them with a log book and shows them how to keep track of their glucose levels. She discusses the importance of a good diet, exercise, and keeping some form of sugar with them if their glucose falls too low. "I try to set them up on a program," she says. "If they have any medication concerns, then I always pass that over to the pharmacists." If patients are still uncomfortable about managing the disease, she refers them to a diabetes centre.

Poirier has also started a program for insulin pumps, since the pharmacy began selling them last year. "I set up each patient with their own file for the other staff if I'm not there," she explains. "It says what insulin pump they're on, what insulin they use, what test strips, etc."

Many patients do not receive adequate training when they are diagnosed with diabetes, so they are grateful for the help Poirier can provide. She cites, for example, the case of an elderly lady who complained that her



Juanita Poirier, pictured here with pharmacist Michelle Cormier, spends up to 15% of her time with diabetes patients alone.

blood sugar was not reading right. Poirier had the patient bring in her meter and test strips, only to discover that the test strips had expired two years ago, and the meter was an old one that had been coded incorrectly. "So we set her up with a new meter that doesn't have to be coded. She was happy as a lark."

Poirier is so tapped into the network that the diabetes nurse at the local hospital invites her to presentations there, and the doctors advise her whenever there is something new. Suppliers often send new products for her son to try, and then seek Poirier's opinion. She even manages a booth at the Lifestyle consumer show to demonstrate how insulin pumps work. She has given presentations on how the pharmacy can help diabetes patients and provides the hospital and some of the doctors' offices with information on what the pharmacy stocks for these patients. "That's where we get a lot of referrals," she says. "People know there's somebody there they can talk to."

She advises technicians who wish to get involved in diabetes care to consult with diabetes centres, take online courses, request information from suppliers and contact diabetes nurses at hospitals.

Having worked as a tech for 10 years now, Poirier is anxious to proceed with regulation, but says the bridging courses are not yet available in New Brunswick.

In the meantime, she takes great satisfaction in working with her patients. "It makes my job great when I can feel like I helped somebody," she says.

Tech Talk is endorsed by:



An educational service for Canadian pharmacy technicians, brought to you by Teva www.tevacanada.com



Publisher:
Jackie Quemby

Editor:
Rosalind Stefanac

Writers:
Chris Damdar, Sally Praskey,
Brett Ruffel

Art Director:
Lima Kim

Proofreader:
Brett Ruffel

Production Manager:
Ajay Masih

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Colleen Curry,
New Brunswick
Community College

Ron Elliott, B.Sc.Pharm.

Pam Fitzmaurice, Technician

Mary Bozoian, CPhT
Canadian Association of
Pharmacy Technicians

Krista Logan, CPhT

Louise Sénécal,
Quebec Association of
Pharmacy Technicians

Margaret Woodruff,
Humber College

Tana Yoon, CPhT (US)

pharmacy
practice

TECH TALK and TECH TALK CE are published by
Pharmacy Practice magazine, a division of Rogers
Publishing Ltd., One Mount Pleasant Road, 7th Floor,
Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2Y5.

No part of these can be reproduced without
the written permission of the publisher.
For more information, contact Rosalind Stefanac.
Tel: 416-764-3926 Fax: 416-764-3931

Is there something you would
like to read about in *Tech Talk*?
Send your ideas and feedback to
rosalind.stefanac@rci.rogers.com

An educational service for
Canadian pharmacy technicians,
brought to you by Teva
www.tevacanada.com



Visit us online at
www.CanadianHealthcareNetwork.ca
www.tevacanada.com

ALBERTA NEWS

PTSA makes education a priority

AS ALBERTA GEARS UP FOR REGULATION, the Pharmacy Technician Society of Alberta (PTSA) is keeping pace with a full slate of educational programs and events.

The Annual Alberta Pharmacy Technician Conference, hosted by PTSA, will move to a two-day format this year. Scheduled for September 16-17 at the Edmonton Marriott at River Cree Resort in Edmonton, the conference will start at 1:00 p.m. on Friday and conclude at 5:00 p.m. Saturday. "At the conference, we want to offer things that are going to help technicians prepare for regulation," says Peggy Pischke, who was elected PTSA president at last year's event. The program will include a number

of interactive workshops.

PTSA has also stepped up its ongoing educational offerings, extending its "Techs in Touch Continuing Education Event Committee" from Calgary to Edmonton.

Pischke says the Committee organizes educational sessions "pretty much on a monthly basis for each city," as well as some webinars. In addition, PTSA plans to expand upon its programs for its pharmacy assistant members, most likely in the form of CE modules that they can purchase, says Pischke.

With regulation imminent—all four bridging courses are being offered at three Alberta colleges—the Association has also secured access to liability insurance for its members.

ONTARIO NEWS

Annual tech conference draws inspired crowd

IN RECENT YEARS, HUMBER COLLEGE'S Annual Pharmacy Technician Conference has centered on the long-discussed prospect of regulation in Ontario. However, with the province finally passing regulation last December, the 29th year of the conference in late February in Toronto looked to next steps for the profession. "Now that everyone's aware of regulated technicians, where do we go from here," notes Leah Barclay, conference coordinator with Humber.

With 270 people in attendance, the turnout was Humber's best in three years, says Barclay. The strong attendance was in part due to many more pharmacies sponsoring their technicians to attend. Humber also welcomed seven new sponsors this year.



New sponsors included manufacturers of natural health products as consumers look to more preventative health measures. In addition, some companies demonstrated automation technology. "Some technicians were concerned about what automation might mean for their function, so they were interested in learning about that and how it might benefit them," says Barclay.

The event featured pharmacy technicians discussing the specialty skills they've acquired in areas such as IV preparations and insulin pump therapy to develop exciting, untraditional careers. It also aimed to give technicians an idea of the kinds of designations they could obtain to further their skills.

Pharmacy technician Lynn Sanders of Brant Arts Dispensary and Laboratory in Burlington, Ont., offered one example of the exciting potential available to technicians. Sanders and Brant Arts pharmacist Carolyn Whiskin discussed the collaborative role they play together in compounding medications for women's health. "Sanders had responsibilities that many attendees thought they could never have," says Barclay of the

technician, who has been trained in compounding by the Professional Compounding Centers of America.

Community pharmacist Farid Wassef delivered one of two keynote presentations, in which he discussed weight management and metabolism. Wassef examined caloric counting, macronutrition, physical activity, stress reduction, sleep and natural health products—an increasingly important topic as more technicians are asked about herbal remedies and other quick fixes for weight loss.

Whiskin delivered the first keynote presentation of the day. The women's health expert inspired attendees to become advocates themselves by living a healthy lifestyle and by creating expanding roles for themselves. "Your realities of practice are changing with this regulation," she said. "I think doors are opening wider and wider for you."

Easing the agony of shingles

MOST OF US KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS suffered the excruciating and often-lingering pain of shingles.

Officially called herpes zoster, shingles is caused by the same virus that causes chicken pox. In the case of the 90% of us who have had chicken pox, the virus lurks in the roots of our nerves and can resurface at any time as shingles. While shingles usually affects older people, it can strike at any age, and can be contagious to those who have not had chicken pox.

Early symptoms of shingles may include fever, chills, headache, and extreme sensitivity, burning, itching or pain in a band on one side of the body. One to three days later, a rash with raised red bumps and blisters erupts, and then the blisters crust over. Treatment includes antiviral medications and steroid creams to reduce the pain and shorten the illness, but is most effective if given within three days of the initial symptoms. Even after the blisters heal, the pain can linger for months or even years, a condition known as post-herpetic neuralgia.

Since 2009, a vaccine has been available to prevent shingles in seniors. While it is not 100% effective, a single dose of the herpes zoster vaccine can protect against the virus, significantly reducing both its frequency and severity. Recommended for adults age 60 and over, the vaccine should not be given to those with a weakened immune system, those allergic to the components of the vaccine, those with untreated tuberculosis, and pregnant women, says the Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion (CCIAP).

Technicians can help shingles sufferers by gathering pertinent information for the pharmacist, says Dr. Susan Bowles, clinical coordinator at Capital Health, Halifax, and associate professor of pharmacy and medicine at Dalhousie University. Often the patient may complain about a rash first to the technician on the front line. If the pharmacist is busy, the technician can ask the patient about the characteristics of the rash, and report this information to the pharmacist. If the patient has already had shingles and is still complaining of pain, the tech can ask him or her to describe the pain, and then refer the patient to the pharmacist, with the relevant information.

Another important role for technicians is to inform older patients of the vaccine, although it is not publicly funded. "In those provinces where pharmacists can immunize, it makes perfect sense to have that immu-

nization occur in the pharmacy," says Dr. Bowles. That's because the vaccine must be kept frozen, with only limited time to be administered once it has been reconstituted.

Dr. Bowles suggests that technicians refer patients to the CCIAP website, www.immunize.ca, for more information. The website features a guide called "Protect yourself against shingles" that can be made available in the pharmacy, she says. "The CCIAP is a good website, and links into other reliable websites."

Shingles sufferers will be relieved to find that help is at hand; technicians can play an important role in the process.





*your global
advantage*

#1 in pharmacy technician education

You already know that Teva is the largest generic pharmaceutical company in the world. But did you know that, compared to our competitors, we also offer Canadian technicians the most extensive resources? Our *Tech Talk* is the only national publication written exclusively for technicians. And *Tech Talk CE* is the first and only technician program to be accredited by the *Canadian Council on Continuing Education in Pharmacy (CCCEP)*.

Trust the global leader that is committed to your professional development.

tevacanada.com