

TECHtalk

NOVEMBER 2019

SETTING STANDARDS IN COMPOUNDING

AS PHARMACIES WORK TO IMPLEMENT the model standards for compounding set by the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA), pharmacy technician and designated compounding inspector Brittany Sharkey is leading the way in Saskatchewan.

In this capacity, she oversees all the compounding implementations, “making sure

everybody is working towards being compliant in the province, assisting them with anything they need, and helping them understand what the standards mean for them,” she explains.

Sharkey landed her current position at the Saskatchewan College of Pharmacy Professionals (SCPP) based on her previous compounding experience and her certification as a compounding inspector.

Her interest in compounding dates back to her very first exposure to the field when, seeking some sort of career in healthcare, she attended an open house for the pharmacy technician program at Saskatchewan Polytechnic where prospective students learned to compound lip balm. “I thought, this is pretty cool,” she laughs. The “hands-on” aspect of the profession appealed to her. In 2010, she graduated from the program and did her practicum at a rural hospital near her home town of Kinistino, where she was given a permanent job. She eventually moved on to other hospitals, both rural and city. “I really saw a lot of different things, especially related to compounding, which has helped me now,” she says.

Upon the passing in 2015 of long-awaited legislation allowing regulated technicians in Saskatchewan, Sharkey became registered in June 2016. At that point, the College thought it should have a technician on staff, and Sharkey’s mentor, pharmacy technician Lyndsay Brakstad, who had precepted her through her initial hospital practicum, encouraged her to apply for the job. Sharkey was hired in October 2016, initially working on pharmacy technician registration. However, when NAPRA announced the compounding standards, “the leadership in the office felt that, with me being a technician and my compounding background in the hospitals, the work of making an implementation plan could be a project I could lead,” she says. Pleased with those results, the leadership decided to transition her out of registration and into the role of field officer and designated compounding inspector.

In that position, Sharkey makes maximum use of technology, conducting virtual inspec-



tions via Skype. “That way, I can do two inspections potentially in completely different areas of the province the same day.” The College plans to cover all the pharmacies in the province by its deadline of December 31, 2020, for implementing the standards.

Given her unconventional career path, Sharkey urges new technicians to “think outside the box and find what you enjoy in the world of pharmacy, where you want to work, and build off that.” She tells any new grad: “don’t let anybody tell you you’re not capable of something, because the sky is the limit. There are so many possibilities that you can do in this profession.”

Sharkey herself hopes to continue to grow within SCPP and build a career that positively impacts pharmacy technicians and pharmacy practice across Canada.

She can’t say enough about the supervisors who have mentored her to this point either. “The ability for me being able to take on such a big role was really a testament to the support of a team of mentors that we have here at the College. They really have allowed me to grow and want to support me to grow.”

She hopes novice technicians reap similar rewards. “Positive mentorship to students out on practicum placements is so important to continue bringing positive energy to the profession,” she says. “If you can take a student under your wing and teach them about the work environment and allow them the opportunity to learn as much as possible in the short time that they’re there, that will increase the odds that your student is going to want to apply for a job at your workplace, as well as set the grounds for a continued mentorship relationship going forward into their career.”

BY THE NUMBERS

777: Number of names added to the Pharmacy Technician Register by examination in 2018

10,261: Total names added since 2009

1,223: Number of candidates who took the Qualifying Examination Part I (MCQ) in 2018

1,133: Number of candidates who took the Qualifying Examination Part II (OSPE) in 2018

328: Number of candidates who wrote the Evaluating Examination in 2018 (last Evaluating Examination held in October 2018)

Source: Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada (PEBC) 2019 Annual Board Meeting summary.

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Reminder to techs about releasing meds to outpatients

COMPLIANCE OFFICERS CONDUCTING hospital pharmacy practice reviews for the College of Pharmacists of British Columbia have noticed that pharmacy technicians are not always following the Community Pharmacy Standards of Practice when releasing medications to outpatients from a hospital pharmacy.

The College points out that every prescription, both new and refill, requires counselling by the pharmacist. It notes that it is not acceptable for technicians and assistants to offer counselling by simply asking: "Do you have any questions for the pharmacist?"

According to the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities' (NAPRA) Model Standards for Canadian Pharmacy

Technicians, pharmacy technicians must confirm that a pharmacist has provided consultation and education to the patient.

They must also:

- Ensure that the right prescription products are released to the right patient or authorized agent.
- Answer the patient's questions, referring him or her to the pharmacist if the question requires patient assessment, clinical analysis or application of therapeutic knowledge.
- Alert patients to written information provided on prescription labels, auxiliary labels or patient inserts.
- Reinforce the availability of the pharmacist for discussion or recommendations.

Expanding techs' role in medication adherence

ACCORDING TO A RECENT ARTICLE IN Science-in-Brief (a publication of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), pharmacy technicians are positioned to become more active in managing medication adherence programs to reduce pharmacists' burden and provide a cost-effective way to re-distribute a pharmacist's time in medication management duties.

"The scope of work for pharmacy technicians is evolving and more opportunities are emerging for technicians to assist pharmacists outside of their traditional roles," noted the article. "Community pharmacists are relying on technicians to provide increased decision and clinical support to improve patient care and

outcomes so that pharmacists can practise efficiently and apply the full extent of their education and training."

The technicians' value is being recognized in anti-coagulation clinics, in emergency departments for medication reconciliation, in pain management and opioid safety, in facilitating post-fracture care, and within the in-patient pharmacies for "tech-check-tech" programs as well.

"Refill adherence is sustainable and can be achieved by implementing a team-based model of care involving chain pharmacists and pharmacy technicians," the article concludes.

Read more at <https://www.cdc.gov/dhds/pubs/docs/SIB-feature-June2019-508.pdf>.

Techs participate in PANS' 40th anniversary conference

SIXTEEN PHARMACY TECHNICIANS joined in the celebrations at the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia's (PANS) 40th anniversary conference in September.

Four of the conference's Saturday sessions were geared specifically to pharmacy technicians, says Amy Wagg, PANS director of communications. These included: Principles for Witnessing Methadone & Buprenorphine Dosing/Naloxone Kit Delivery Standards; The Standards and Beyond: The Role of the Pharmacy Technician in Providing Patient Care; Diabetes Devices: An Update (glucometers and insulin pen devices); and Gulp, Don't Gargle: A Review of Technical Snares in Dispensing Medication and the Methods to Overcome Them.

Although these sessions were aimed at pharmacy technicians, "any conference attendee could attend them, and many did," says Wagg.

Faith Ryder was the recipient of the Pharmacy Technician of the Year award. Ryder has had a passion for pharmacy since she was a teenager. At the age of 13, she volunteered at a pharmacy, answering phones and keeping the pharmacy workstations clean. In high school, she worked as a pharmacy assistant.

Since obtaining her pharmacy technician license in 2017, Ryder has become a key member of the Barrington Passage Pharmsave team. She also serves as a preceptor for a local high school's co-operative education program.

Pharmacy5in5: drug interactions unique to women

ANTI-SEIZURE DRUGS HAVE MANY interactions, but some of those are unique to women.

That's the topic of the latest Pharmacy5in5 module. Pharmacist Tejal Patel worked with the University of Waterloo School of Pharmacy team to explore how anti-seizure drugs affect birth control, menopause and osteoporosis.

Pharmacy5in5 lets pharmacy technicians and pharmacists test their knowledge on a given topic by taking a short quiz and answering just five questions in five minutes.

To access the modules, log onto the website at <https://pharmacy5in5.ca>, create your free account, and take the interactive quiz on any of the many topics.

OCP publishes tech FAQ on practice assessments

WITH THE ROLLOUT OF ASSESSMENTS for pharmacy technicians in community and hospital practice settings, which formally launched at the beginning of this year, the Ontario College of Pharmacists (OCP) has introduced an FAQ to clarify the process.

The FAQ explains what happens during the practice assessment, how long it takes, whether the results are shared, how soon after the assessment technicians can see their results, and much more.

The College says it will assess all pharmacy technicians every four to six years. Assessments focus on four key areas: patient care support activities; collaboration and decision-making; documentation; and communication and education. Practice advisors evaluate the processes in place for each of these areas with respect to drug distribution activities, compounding practices, best possible medication histories, and patient education activities (i.e., education on devices, compression stockings, etc.) as appropriate.

Technicians now eligible for CSHP National Awards

THE CANADIAN SOCIETY OF HOSPITAL PHARMACISTS (CSHP) is updating its National Awards Program with a new format and categories that include pharmacy technicians.

"The shared goal of updating the program to meet the needs of all CSHP members was always top of mind," says Jody Ciufo, CSHP chief executive officer. "Not only are the new offerings reflective of the Society's values, but for the first time, we are opening up the National Awards Program to Individual Supporters as well. We want to recognize the contributions of all members of the healthcare team, including pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, student pharmacists and others."

The new categories include: Distinguished Service Award; Excellence in Pharmacy Practice—Interprofessional Collaboration; Excellence in Pharmacy Practice—Leadership; and Excellence in Pharmacy Practice—Patient Care.

Award recipients will be announced in January 2020 and honoured at a ceremony to be held at the Professional Practice Conference on February 1.

ACP educates public on role of pharmacy techs

THE ALBERTA COLLEGE OF PHARMACY (ACP) has launched a website to educate consumers about the role of pharmacy technicians and pharmacists, and to inform them of what to expect from their pharmacy teams.

The pharmacy technician section covers a range of duties, including: filling prescriptions and ensuring they are accurate; compounding drugs; collecting and recording health information; working with the pharmacist to regularly review that new drugs are stored, prepared and distributed in a safe and effective manner; helping patients make informed choices about healthcare aids and devices, and training them how to use them properly; and assisting patients in selecting non-prescription products, and understanding when to refer them to a pharmacist.

Visit the new website at <https://yourpharmacyteam.squarespace.com>.

Dealing with difficult patients

EVERY PHARMACY TECHNICIAN AND assistant has been there: confronted with an irate patient who is determined to find fault. Perhaps his prescription wasn't ready; maybe it wasn't covered by his insurance; or the medication was out of stock. Whatever the reason, it is the technicians and assistants who usually bear the brunt of these patients' wrath. However, there are ways to defuse the situation.

First of all, remain calm. As Winnipeg clinical pharmacist Kristine Petrasko says, "We need to take our QTIPs to work with us each day—Quit Taking it Personally!" Try to put yourself in your patients' shoes. After all, most patients visiting the pharmacy are not feeling well or have an ailment. You don't know what else may be happening in their lives, or what may have befallen them earlier in the day.

"Talking to patients can be very challenging and it is completely normal for us to become frustrated as well," says Petrasko. "It takes a lot of practice to get yourself to a point of being able to step back and look at things from their point of view and to not make a judgement. It is

best to simply listen and acknowledge their feelings—you don't need to agree with them and the issue—but you can acknowledge their frustration and normalize things."

Once the problem has been identified, explain why it occurred and try to come up with a solution that will satisfy the patient. For example, if the pharmacy has run out of a specific medication, phone other pharmacies to obtain the drug or offer to expedite the order. If you give frustrated patients choices, they will feel that they can become part of the solution.

After you have found the best possible solution, work with your supervisors to try to prevent the problem from happening again.

But sometimes the best attempts to calm down an angry customer will fail. With the growing opioid epidemic and more restrictions now placed on the number of opioid pills that can be prescribed and dispensed, that may

lead to more frequent encounters with patients with addictions. "Often, if you meet these patients' frustration/anger with respect and understanding, you can defuse even the toughest situations," says Petrasko. "They are often just looking for someone to care about their thoughts and to validate their frustrations. If your patient comes in angry on methamphetamine, there is nothing you can do to bring them back to reality quickly. All you can do is acknowledge their feelings and let them know they can come back to talk in a few days," she says. Distraction can also work. "Try spinning the positive over each negative thought or comment they have and just really try to show that you care," says Petrasko. "If you can't get through to them and the angry outburst continues, you have the right to call for the pharmacist and/or the police to intervene."

No technicians or assistants should put themselves in danger.

Sources: Drug Topics, The ePharmacy Technicians.com, Pharmacy Times

TRY A LATTE

Coffee chain Starbucks tried a number of ways of dealing with disgruntled coffee-deprived customers, and finally found one that worked. Company trainers believed that if they taught their new baristas a routine for dealing with an angry customer, they could make it a habit.

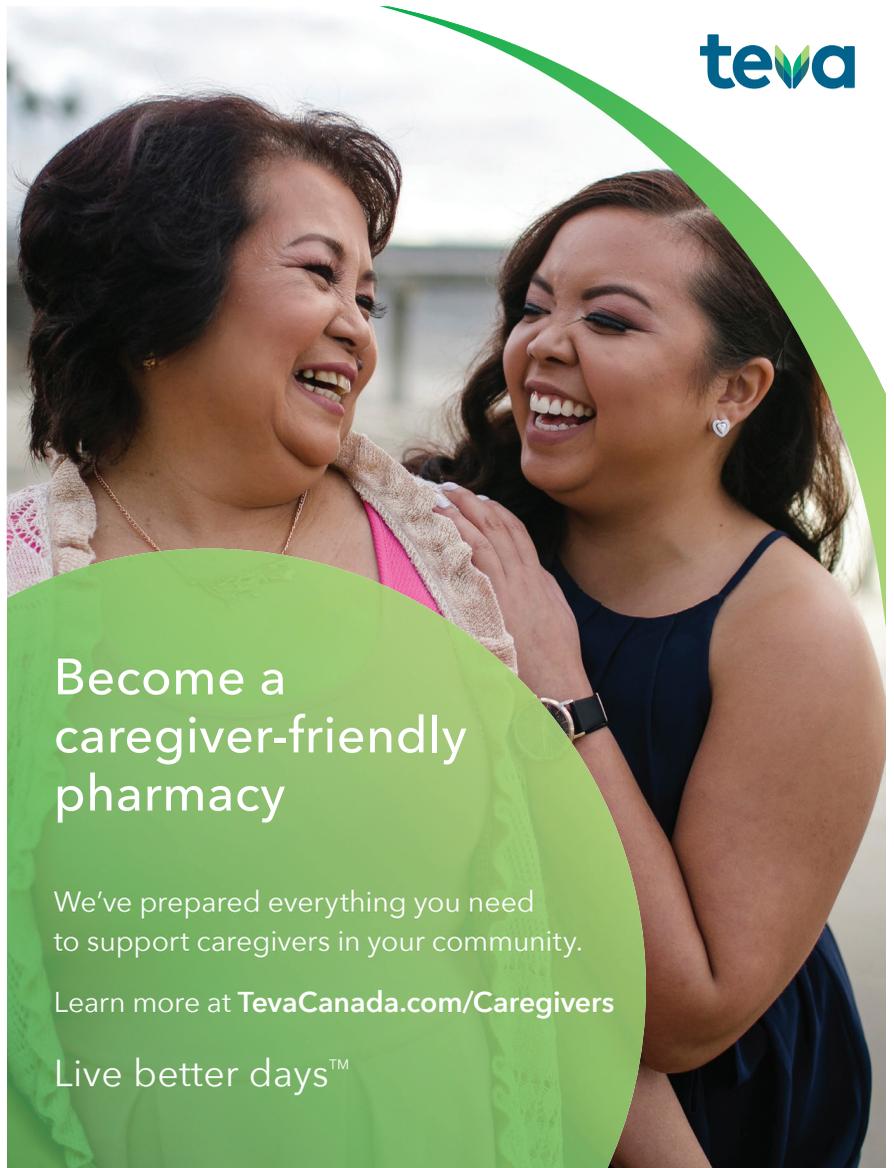
Starbucks chose the mnemonic "LATTE" to help employees deal with disgruntled customers.

1. Listen to the customer
2. Acknowledge the problem/complaint
3. Take action to solve the problem
4. Thank the customer for the feedback
5. Explain what you have done

10 WAYS TO DEFUSE

1. Take a deep breath.
2. Remain professional.
3. Don't take it personally.
4. Try to ascertain what the problem is.
5. Listen reflectively. Use the patient's language so he knows you are really listening.
6. Apologize, if appropriate.
7. Try to solve the problem.
8. If you can't solve the problem, refer the patient to someone who can.
9. If you feel you are losing control, step back and ask for help.
10. If the customer is being abusive, ask for help.

Source: Drug Topics, April 2019

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