

TECHtalk

JULY 2020

BY THE NUMBERS*

MEDICATION INCIDENTS: SASKATCHEWAN COMMUNITY PHARMACY

26,753:

Total number of incidents reported to Community Pharmacy Incident Reporting (CPIIR) database between December 1, 2017 and March 30, 2020.*

Top 3 types of incidents:

- Incorrect dose/frequency: 6,323
- Incorrect quantity: 4,713
- Incorrect drug: 4,415

Outcome of NO ERROR (intercepted before reaching the patient): 16,748

NO HARM (incidents reached the patient but did not cause harm): 9,326

HARM (reported incidents did result in HARM, with most of these in the category of MILD HARM): 679

Source: COMPASS ("Community Pharmacy Professionals Advancing Safety in Saskatchewan") Program Newsletter, April 2020.

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TECH HONOURED FOR DEDICATION TO PROFESSION

WHEN PHARMACY TECHNICIAN DON RIDLEY

received the professionalism award from the Pharmacy Technician Society of Alberta (PTSA) at its 2019 Annual Conference, he says he was "surprised and humbled."

The honour didn't come as a surprise to his colleagues, however. Over the years, Ridley has worked tirelessly on behalf of the profession, volunteering in many capacities as a voice for technicians.

"Don Ridley is a leader, an innovator, a mentor and an advocate for pharmacy technicians throughout the province," says Ivan Yu, PTSA membership director and a member of the selection committee for the award. "His contributions to the profession have had a significant impact in shaping technician scope of practice in both community and hospital settings."

After graduating from the pharmacy technician course at Red Deer College in 1983, Ridley began his career on the frontlines, specializing in purchasing and gradually assuming positions of increasing responsibility. Now operations manager at Alberta Health Services, based at Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton, Ridley manages 50 assistants, 10 technicians and 10 pharmacists.

He has been in management for about 15 years now, a position that he says involves "a lot of meetings," particularly when the pandemic hit. At that point, the hospital closed down all its operating rooms and many of its beds, he says. While some of the managers began to work from home, Ridley continued to work at the hospital. "I have a lot of staff and I feel I need to be here for them as well," he says. "I don't think we need to jump off the boat and leave them all to do the work here." Of course, all staff follow safety protocols and wear personal protective equipment.

Even though there have been fewer patients in the hospital during the closure, the team has been busy with procurement. "We are sort of a warehouse site here," Ridley explains. "We package for up to 10 other sites. We brought in a lot of additional stock so that we were prepared [for the pandemic]." In addition to the daily responsibilities, Ridley and his team are always engaged in a variety of special projects. Currently, they are working on getting all the stock barcoded, with plans to go live within the next year.

Ridley says his greatest challenge, aside from coping with the pandemic, "is trying to influence technicians to broaden our scope of practice and then to motivate others to do more." To this end, he has volunteered for many years on the PTSA board, including terms as vice-president and president, as well as on standards-setting committees for the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada. Currently, he is one of two pharmacy technicians on the Alberta College of Pharmacy (ACP) Council. "When I'm serving on ACP, I'm trying to get the voice of technicians heard because a lot of it is pharmacist driven," he explains. "Most of my duties involve taking part in meetings, making decisions about the future of pharmacy. Being on Council has given me the opportunity to interact with other representatives from healthcare and pharmacy and to make the technician role more visible." He regularly attends conferences in Canada and the U.S. to further that goal.

Ridley urges new technicians to take up the torch. "Pharmacy technicians need to be our best advocates, and we need to provide input to colleges and government on our standards and scope of practice." After all, it's all about learning by example.



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Pharmacy organizations opt for virtual conferences

WITH ALL IN-PERSON MEETINGS AND conferences falling victim to COVID-19, some pharmacy organizations have decided to hold virtual sessions instead.

The PEI Pharmacists Association designated the month of May as “PEI Pharmacists Association Virtual Conference Month,” offering a variety of webinars for pharmacy technicians and pharmacists alike.

“Our technician members did attend and provided positive feedback, saying things like ‘I learned and received new information that I can use daily in my profession’,” says Erin MacKenzie, executive director, PEI Pharmacists Association. One technician-led presentation was an accredited program on Biologics/Biosimilars, and another focused on Opioid Replacement Therapy.

Three other webinars addressed assessment and prescribing for common ailments (acne, atopic dermatitis and onychomycosis). “For these, it was pointed out that, while the pharmacist would be the one doing the actual assessment/prescribing, it is important for the RPhT to be aware of those conditions that can be treated by the pharmacist,” says MacKenzie. “As part of the team, the technician may be the

one suggesting the patient see the pharmacist. The presenters for all programs were made aware that the audience consisted of pharmacists, technicians and students.”

The Pharmacy Association of Saskatchewan (PAS) also hosted a Virtual Conference Series, featuring several sessions that were relevant to pharmacy technicians and eligible for CEU credits, says Donna Hudson, executive coordinator, PAS.

“The live webinar registration is available to technicians and promoted through our PAS website and communications,” she adds. “The recordings of the sessions are also available on the PAS website 2020 Conference page that pharmacy technicians may access at www.skpharmacists.ca/site/pd/2020_pas_conference.”

Meanwhile, as of press time, the Pharmacy Technician Society of Alberta (PTSA) was mulling over its options. Having already postponed its 30th Annual Alberta Pharmacy Technician Conference to September 10-11, 2021, the Association was considering hosting a virtual conference for continuing education this year and surveying members as to format and timing.

CCCEP seeks technician volunteers on review panels

THE CANADIAN COUNCIL ON CONTINUING EDUCATION IN PHARMACY (CCCEP) is inviting pharmacy technicians to volunteer on its Learning Review Panels.

CCCEP engages approximately 100 volunteer pharmacy technicians and pharmacists to ensure its accredited programs are of high quality and adhere to its established standards and guidelines. The panel reviews the learning activity, identifies any issues and concerns, and makes a recommendation to CCCEP on accreditation.

Pharmacy technician panels review learning activities intended for the pharmacy technician audience; activities submitted for both technicians and pharmacists are reviewed by two panels.

CCCEP offers a small honorarium to cover some of the printing and other costs that panelists may incur in doing the reviews, and as an expression of appreciation. Panelists also earn continuing education credits.

New panelists are added periodically, and training is provided for those selected. For information on how to apply, visit www.cccep.ca/pages/current_openings_for_cccep_volunteers.html?page=pharmacisttechnician.

OPA offers pandemic tips and podcasts

THE ONTARIO PHARMACISTS ASSOCIATION (OPA), which counts pharmacy technicians and assistants among its members, has enlisted leading experts to help it develop a series of video modules called “Pandemic Tips.”

“Our goal is to guide our members, as well as all pharmacy professionals, through the COVID-19 pandemic by providing these informative and practical tips on how to navigate this crisis,” says the website. A video on medication renewal features tips for when it may be difficult to access the prescriber during a pandemic. Other topics include mental health, opioid agonist therapy and more.

OPA has also published the fourth episode in its monthly “Pharmacists’ Matters” podcast, hosted by CEO Justin Bates. The latest episode covers OPA’s member engagement initiatives during the pandemic.

ISMP Canada provides pandemic safety advice for technicians

WITH VERBAL PHONE ORDERS BECOMING more common during the pandemic, the Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada (ISMP Canada) provides six recommendations to help ensure clear communication between practitioners.

For practitioners who are receiving prescriptions and medication orders, ISMP makes the following recommendations:

- Obtain the prescriber's name, licence number and contact information at the start of the call.
- Immediately transcribe or enter the medication order into its permanent record (e.g., patient chart, pharmacy hard copy and/or profile) to facilitate accurate documentation of the prescription. Delaying this documentation step can contribute to erroneous transcription.

- Ask the prescriber to state the indication for use of the medication if it is not provided as part of the order.
- Clarify any ambiguous aspects of the prescription.
- Read the complete order back to the prescriber as documented, for verification and to catch any errors (the "read-back" technique).
- Request confirmation from the prescriber that the read-back matches the intended order.

Another ISMP Canada Safety Bulletin of interest to hospital pharmacy technicians provides directions for conducting Virtual Medication History Interviews and Discharge Education, noting that "the need for such adaptation has come to the forefront during the pandemic." The Bulletin recommends that medication history interviews and dis-

charge patient education be conducted by telephone, video communication or email, with the dual goals of reducing the number of non-essential entries into patients' rooms (and the associated risk of viral transmission) and conserving personal protective equipment during a pandemic.

For more information, visit www.ismp-canada.org/ISMPCSafetyBulletins.htm.

SCPP prepares for technicians on Council

THE SASKATCHEWAN COLLEGE OF PHARMACY PROFESSIONALS (SCPP) has begun work to examine the options for electing pharmacy technicians to Council.

"A Council Restructure Task Force was formed and was very active throughout 2019," said Marilyn Youngmans, SCPP president, in her address in the 2019 annual report. "A new Council structure and administrative bylaws will be further developed throughout 2020 with a new online election process, terms and positions for the 2021 election."

Currently, Lyndsay Brakstad and Michelle Miller are designated as pharmacy technician observers on Council.

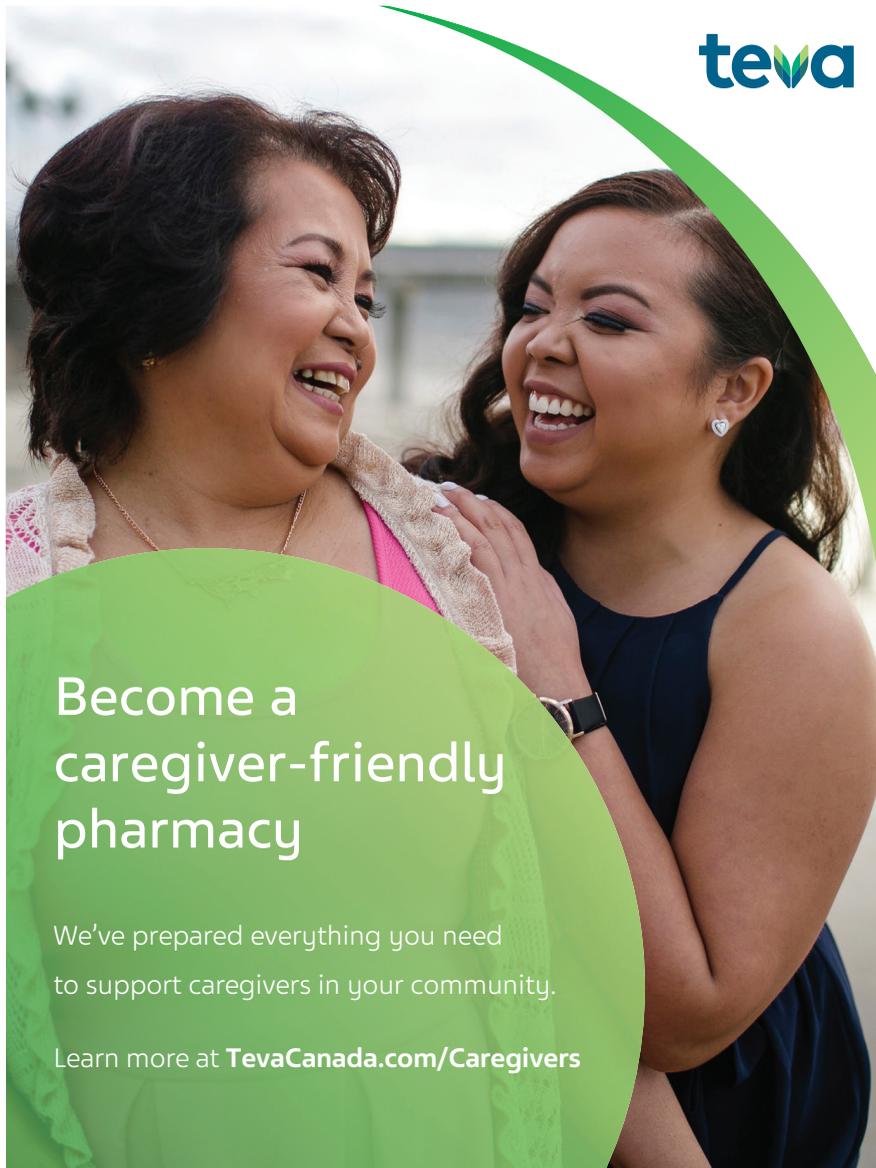
According to SCPP, there were 373 practising pharmacy technicians in the province as of the end of 2019. Regulation began in October 2015.

CAPT announces executive committee transition

FOLLOWING ITS VIRTUAL ANNUAL General Meeting on May 23, the Canadian Association of Pharmacy Technicians (CAPT) has announced the transition of its 2020 executive committee:

- Colleen Norris moves from president to past president.
- Robert Solek moves from vice president to president.
- Sheena Deane was elected vice president, and also retains her role as director of finance.
- Zenobia Roussel begins training as director of finance, while retaining her role as director of external affairs.
- Mona Sousa was elected to retain her position as director of membership.
- Linda Power was acclaimed as director of promotions and public affairs.

Other positions were not up for election this year, so Lois Battcock remains as director of administration, Samantha Jenkins as director of internal affairs, and Rahila Ovais as director of social media and communications.



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Helping patients manage pain

MOST OF US KNOW SOMEONE WHO suffers from chronic pain. In fact, one in five Canadians lives with this debilitating condition, according to the Canadian Pain Task Force.

Chronic pain is pain which persists past normal healing time and lasts for more than three to six months. It can have a significant impact on individuals' physical and mental health, often preventing them from undertaking everyday activities, says the Task Force, which was implemented in 2019 to help the federal government better understand and address the needs of these patients.

Chronic pain can occur after trauma, in association with diseases such as arthritis, or as a result of inadequately treated acute pain after surgery. Recently, the World Health Organization recognized chronic pain as a disease in its own right, sometimes present without a known cause or source.

There are three main biological mechanisms related to pain:

- Nociceptive pain (usually acute) arises from damage to body tissue and is the typical pain one experiences as a result of injury, disease or inflammation. It is usually described as a sharp, aching or throbbing pain.
- Neuropathic pain arises from direct damage to the nervous system itself. It is typically described as burning or shooting pain, and the skin can be numb, tingling or extremely sensitive to even light touch.
- Nociplastic pain arises from a change in the way sensory neurons function, rather than from direct damage to the nervous system. It is similar in nature to neuropathic pain.

Tasks for techs

Pharmacy technicians can play an important role in helping chronic pain sufferers, says Ron Marcinkoski, chief compounding pharmacist and clinical specialty pharmacist at Pharmacare Specialty Pharmacy in Edmonton. For example, they can help identify patients

who may need to be referred to the pharmacist for counselling, based on several factors, including: the types of prescriptions they have (e.g., tramadol, acetaminophen, morphine, etc.); the frequency of their visits to the pharmacy; their history; and the type of over-the-counter medications they purchase.

Technicians can also administer a brief pain survey, in person or via telephone or Skype, using the Wong Baker pain scale or other visual tools, suggests Marcinkoski. (See www.painbc.ca/health-professionals/assessment-tools for four basic pain-rating scales.) They can scan these documents into patients' files and update them every visit, informing the pharmacist if pain levels are increasing. Additionally, technicians could follow up with patients to monitor the effectiveness of or reactions to new medications.

It is also within the scope of pharmacy technicians to suggest non-pharmacological alternatives, notes Marcinkoski. In the store,

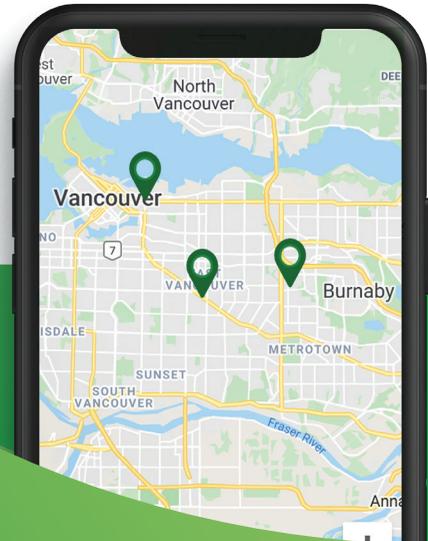


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these might include medical supplies such as heating pads, braces, and TENS machines; and nutritional supplements like magnesium, vitamin D and topicals. Marcinkoski recommends Six Pillars of Pain Management, created by the Pain Society of Alberta, for alternative ways to address chronic pain. The “Six Pillars,” presented as an easy-to-read infographic, are: Lifestyle, Psychological, Physical Therapies, Interventional Therapies, Spirituality, and Medications. Each pillar features suggestions for activities or treatments besides

medications. “This is an excellent handout for technicians and pharmacists to give to chronic pain patients,” he says.

Clearly, pharmacy technicians can be a tremendous asset when it comes to the management of chronic pain. “I feel that a compassionate and helpful technician can be an excellent resource for the pharmacist and ultimately give better patient care,” says Marcinkoski. “This makes the technician an integral part of the physician–pharmacist–patient relationship.”

RESOURCES

- [The Canadian Pain Society](http://www.canadianpainsociety.ca) www.canadianpainsociety.ca (see www.canadianpainsociety.ca/page/OnlineResources for additional links)
- [Canadian Pain Task Force](http://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/corporate/about-health-canada/public-engagement/external-advisory-bodies/canadian-pain-task-force.html) www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/corporate/about-health-canada/public-engagement/external-advisory-bodies/canadian-pain-task-force.html
- [Chronic Pain Association of Canada](http://www.chronicpaincanada.com) www.chronicpaincanada.com
- [Pain BC](http://www.painbc.ca) www.painbc.ca
- [Pain Society of Alberta](http://www.painab.ca) www.painab.ca (see www.painab.ca/resources for additional links)

Notes