

TECHtalk

APRIL 2021

EDUCATING AND ADVOCATING

TO SAY CALGARY PHARMACY TECHNICIAN Morgan Lahl likes to keep busy is an understatement. She not only holds two jobs but also is in her second year as president of the Pharmacy Technician Society of Alberta (PTSA).

Pharmacy wasn't on her radar until her high-school health science class in Texas—where she lived for four years—visited a hospital to shadow different medical units and health professionals. “The hospital pharmacy was beautiful, and it had so many new technologies,” she says. “The staff told me all about pharmacy and I thought, ‘This is what I need to do!’”

She volunteered at her local community pharmacy while studying for the pharmacy technician exam in Texas and taking university elective courses. At that point, she moved back to Calgary and happened on Robertson College's Career Services, where she learned more about the pharmacy technician course and signed up immediately.

Upon graduation seven years ago, she landed a position at Foothills Medical Centre. Three months in, her manager offered her a job at Southern Alberta Clinic, an outpatient clinic for people diagnosed with HIV. “I couldn't turn down an offer like that,” she says. She has been there ever since.

But that job was only four days a week, so in 2015, the ambitious Lahl got a job as an institutional pharmacy instructor at Robertson College, where she teaches one day a week. Last September, she was asked to be part-time coordinator for the course as well. Naturally, she agreed, and now spends about 15 hours a week in that role, usually in the evenings and on weekends.

Due to pandemic restrictions, Robertson College has transitioned to virtual classes, except for the lab sessions, which Lahl says makes it more difficult to engage with the students. At the HIV pharmacy, her interactions with patients are limited primarily to telephone appointments. “I find that the conversations are a lot longer, because it isn't just about medical care anymore, it's also about mental health care,” she says.

Lahl's involvement with the PTSA came about largely by happenstance when a board



member interviewed her for a story about teaching. After finding out more about the organization, she immediately jumped on board. “It was a relatively new board and I had asked to be vice-president, never really having much experience,” she laughs. “But I'm one of those people who just goes for it. I think about it later, but I think sometimes you just have to take that initiative and the opportunities when they come.”

After a year as vice-president, Lahl became president in 2019 for a two-year term. In this capacity, she advocates for more marketable skills for technicians. “I think something that's often discussed is that there's such a variance in pay between community and institutional technicians, and I feel that a skill set could balance out something like that for members of our profession.”

She urges technicians to get involved in their profession through their provincial or national association, and cites Teresa Hennessey, current PTSA administrator, long-time board member and the first registered pharmacy technician in Alberta, as an inspiration and mentor for her own career path.

“We're hoping there are more technicians who are willing to take the torch and realize how important our profession is and that we are an essential part of the pharmacy team,” she says. “It is just so important that new pharmacy technicians really hold to what their scope of practice is—to learn it, to educate and to advocate.”

BY THE NUMBERS*

Total number of pharmacy technicians in Canada: **9,564**

- Alberta: **1,612**
- British Columbia: **1,645**
- Manitoba: **177**
- New Brunswick: **244**
- Newfoundland and Labrador: **198**
- Nova Scotia: **194**
- Ontario: **5,051**
- Prince Edward Island: **72**
- Saskatchewan: **371**

*As of January 1, 2020. There are no licensed pharmacy technicians in Quebec or the Territories. Source: National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities.

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B.C. College seeks input to update jurisprudence exam

THE COLLEGE OF PHARMACISTS OF B.C. has decided it is time to update and modernize its Jurisprudence Exam (JE), and has called upon pharmacy technicians and pharmacists to help by providing input through a series of workshops.

The JE is designed to assess registrants' knowledge of and ability to interpret and apply legislation contained in the federal and provincial acts, including the Code of Ethics, as a requirement for registration as a pharmacy professional in B.C.

Registered pharmacy technicians and pharmacists have been invited to participate in one or more of a series of virtual workshops that include blueprinting, item writing, item review, form review and standard setting. Each workshop is expected to have two to four meetings, lasting up to four hours. The first workshop is tentatively scheduled to begin in May, with others following through to March 2022. Participants receive an honorarium for time spent preparing for and attending meetings.

PTCB launches immunization credential for techs

THE U.S.-BASED PHARMACY TECHNICIAN Certification Board (PTCB) has launched an Assessment-Based Certification in Immunization Administration. The credential demonstrates a Certified Pharmacy Technician's (CPhT's) qualification to safely deliver and manage immunizations and related tasks, including preparation, documentation, storage and disposal.

Candidates must complete a PTCB-recognized Immunization Administration education/training program to earn eligibility to take the assessment. The programs require live demonstration of successful hands-on technique when administering an intramuscular and subcutaneous injection. In addition to documenting safe immunization delivery to patients, the certificate signifies knowledge

and skills in immunization schedules, storage of doses, management of personal protective equipment and other areas.

The Immunization Administration Certificate takes a CPhT one step closer to becoming a PTCB Advanced Certified Pharmacy Technician (CPhT-Adv). Active PTCB CPhTs earn this credential once they have completed at least four of the PTCB's six certificate programs and the Compounded Sterile Preparation Technician Certification, as well as three years of work experience.

The PTCB also announced that it has provided funding to pharmacy associations in two states to support technician training and encourage technicians to practise in advanced roles.

Dates, locations added for tech injection training

AS INCREASING NUMBERS OF PHARMACIES join the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, training programs for technicians to administer injections in Ontario and Nova Scotia are keeping pace.

The Ontario Pharmacists Association will continue to add dates and locations for the "in-person live session" of its Injection Training Certificate for Pharmacy Technicians. At last check, it had nine locations throughout the province, with a choice of dates. "More sessions will continue to become available based on demand and the practical exam for all registrants can be accommodated," notes the website. For more information, visit Injection Training Certificate Program for Pharmacy Technicians | Ontario Pharmacists Association

(opatoday.com).

For its part, PharmAchieve offers its Immunization & Injections Certificate for Technicians in 13 locations across Ontario, including multiple dates in larger cities, as well as in Halifax, N.S. It plans to add three more Ontario cities in the near future. Visit pharmachieve.com/register#immun-course.

Dalhousie University's Continuing Pharmacy Education (CPE) usually offers the workshop portion of its Pharmacy Technician Administration of Drugs by Injection course in the spring and fall. Visit Pharmacy Technician Administration of Drugs by Injection—Continuing Pharmacy Education—Dalhousie University.

Labels on targeted drugs can help solve robberies

WITH PHARMACY ROBBERIES ON THE RISE, Calgary Police Service recommends that pharmacy teams attach labels to the bottoms of containers containing narcotics and other targeted substances. The labels should be site-specific and unique to the pharmacy, reports the Alberta College of Pharmacy (ACP). If the labels are not an option, police suggest even writing the name of the pharmacy with a felt marker on the bottom of containers.

“Attaching a label to targeted products helps police with their investigations in the event the stolen drugs are recovered,” notes ACP. “Knowing where the drugs were stolen from assists the police a great deal in successfully convicting the offenders.”

Another option is to use GPS tracking devices. The concealed trackers can be applied to containers, allowing authorities to track the robbers in real time.

ISMP Canada issues bulletin on vaccine error prevention

AS MORE AND MORE PHARMACY TECHNICIANS have a role to play in COVID-19 vaccine administration in community pharmacies—whether in preparing vaccines, administering doses, or any other capacity within their scope of practice—the Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) Canada recently issued a safety bulletin titled “Preventing Errors with COVID-19 Vaccines: Learning from Vaccine Incidents.”

The bulletin shares a number of leading practices that facilitate the safe administration of a COVID-19 vaccine. It covers four areas: storage, preparation, administration and documentation. An accompanying chart notes the risks for vaccine error in each of these areas and outlines strategies for safe vaccine practices.

To access the bulletin, visit [ISMPCSB2021-i2-COVID19-Vaccine-Error-Prevention\(ismp-canada.org\)](https://ismpcsb2021-i2-COVID19-Vaccine-Error-Prevention(ismp-canada.org)).

When faxes go astray

WHAT SHOULD PHARMACY TECHS do when they receive a fax from a practitioner's office that was not meant for their pharmacy?

The Saskatchewan College of Pharmacy Professionals and the Prince Edward Island College of Pharmacy offer some advice to pharmacy professionals who receive misdirected faxes: alert the practitioner's office and request that the fax be sent to the appropriate pharmacy, as it constitutes a privacy breach.

It is not appropriate to fax the prescription to the intended pharmacy or to enter the prescription information into the pharmacy software system to transfer it to the intended pharmacy, since the patient has not provided consent to collect, use or disclose their personal health information.

For more information, pharmacy techs can contact their provincial Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

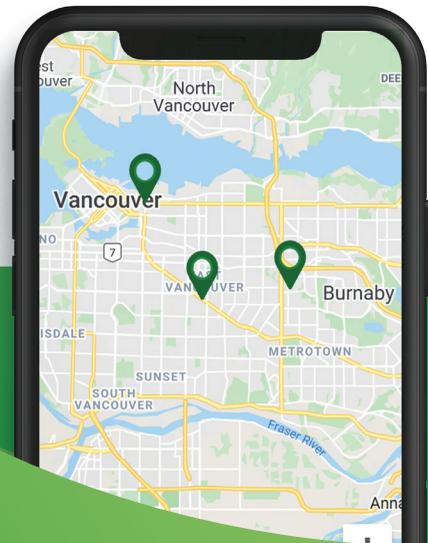


Get your caregiver-friendly pharmacy on the map

Teva Canada's free, accredited Continuing Education course, the Caregiver-Friendly Pharmacy Training Program, prepares pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to recognize and support caregivers with tangible resources and tools.

Building a trusted relationship with caregivers is good for your pharmacy: many caregivers will also require pharmacy products and services for themselves and other family members.

Better yet, once you've successfully completed the program, we'll promote your pharmacy by adding it to our interactive map of Canada to show caregivers the names and locations of pharmacies that have been trained to help them!



To register for the CE, and add your pharmacy to the map once you've completed the CE, visit:

TevaCanada.com/CaregiverPharmacies

This CE has been accredited by CCEP for 1.5 Continuing Education Units.

Smoking cessation: no butts about it

WHILE COVID-19 HAS DOMINATED health-related news this past year, tobacco continues to be the number one cause of preventable disease and death in Canada. According to The Lung Association, an estimated 45,000 Canadians die each year from smoking while countless others live with chronic diseases. Despite public health education and prevention efforts, approximately 15 per cent of Canadians currently smoke.

Pharmacists—and their technicians and assistants—play a key role in smoking cessation. In most provinces, pharmacists can prescribe and dispense nicotine replacement products and, in some provinces, can provide smoking cessation counselling, notes the Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada.



Pharmacy technicians and assistants are an integral part of a pharmacy's smoking cessation program, says Chris Oliveira, Smoking Cessation Certified Pharmacist and owner of two independent pharmacies in Brampton, Ont.

Oliveiro has designated one of his assistants a smoking cessation program “captain,” a role that can also be fulfilled by a pharmacy technician. “The captain is responsible for the understanding of the pharmacy’s smoking cessation program, the pharmacotherapy involved and its key features,” explains Oliveira, who is also Ontario vice-president of Pharmacists for a Smoke-Free Canada. “He or she needs to know what is included in the program and be aware of the drug interactions between tobacco and many common medications. The captain must be aware of the monetary cost of smoking cigarettes so she can inform prospective clients.”

The captain helps recruit clients for the program by gathering names from the team of pharmacists and technicians/assistants. She then calls them to screen for their willingness to quit and to determine if they qualify for any third-party eligibility through the provincial drug plan or Green Shield. She informs patients not covered by either of those plans of the cost of the program and what it includes.

Following those conversations, the captain books appointments with Oliveira, the pharmacy’s smoking cessation certified pharmacist, for patients interested in quitting. She keeps a calendar of appointments for all consultation meetings and follow-ups, and reminds Oliveira of the appointments. “Finally, the captain is responsible for all billings—consultations and follow-ups,” says Oliveira. “She is also responsible for refilling all pertinent pharmacotherapy.”

Intake pharmacy technicians and assistants can help flag potential clients by asking about smoking status when a prescription is presented. “If patients ask why, we tell them that research has shown that smoking interacts with many drugs,” Oliveira explains. “The patient doesn’t have to disclose smoking status if they do not wish to.”

Pharmacy technicians can also initiate medication reviews and ask for smoking status at that time. “If we learn that the patient smokes, we ask if they are interested in quitting,” says Oliveira. As well, “Any patient who is getting a prescription for an upcoming surgery is asked by the technician or assistant if they smoke, as smoking can delay healing times. If these patients are concerned about healing times and wish to quit smoking, they are referred to our smoking cessation program captain.”

For Oliveira, pharmacy technicians are central to the success of a smoking cessation program. “Pharmacy owners like me feel that unless pharmacy technicians are involved in the promotion and execution of the program, the program’s full potential may not be realized.”

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Resources for patients

- Canadian Cancer Society’s Smokers’ Helpline, 1-877-513-5333; www.smokershelpline.ca
- Health Canada’s Quit Lines 1-866-366-3667; website www.gosmokefree.gc.ca
- The Lung Association website Smoking and Tobacco | the lung association
- Most pharmacy websites also provide information and resources on smoking cessation.