BY THE NUMBERS
REGISTRATIONS DECLINING

Number of names added to the Pharmacy Technician Register by examination in 2016: 957
Total names since 2009: 8,514
Number of candidates who took the Qualifying Examination—Part I (MCQ) in 2016: 1,293 (compared to 2,000 in 2015)
Number of candidates who took the Qualifying Examination—Part II (OSPE): 1,294 (compared to 2,181 in 2015)
Number of candidates who wrote the Pharmacy Technician Evaluating Examination in 2016 at centres in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland: 333 (compared to 454 in 2015)


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Manitoba streamlines final check application for techs

AT ITS JUNE 2017 COUNCIL MEETING, the College of Pharmacists of Manitoba changed its Pharmacy Technician Final Check process. Pharmacies can now submit their completed applications directly to the College for approval. This will streamline the approval process, making it more official and timely.

The College developed the Pharmacy Technician Final Check Application for use in both community and hospital pharmacies. The application process requires pharmacy managers and staff to assess current dispensing processes to determine the changes required for a pharmacy technician to perform the final check safely and in compliance with legislation.

OCP developing strategy to better integrate techs

THE ONTARIO COLLEGE OF PHARMACISTS (OCP) is currently developing a strategy that will build on existing efforts to integrate pharmacy technicians in practice and allow them to work to their full scope. In addition to implementing core College programs, such as quality assurance, that will impact this goal, OCP will engage educators, pharmacy owners, corporations, and other stakeholders to support this strategy.

According to OCP Council, the voter participation rate in the most recent election for pharmacy technician positions on Council was only about 10 per cent. This poor response indicates low member engagement within the profession, particularly in community pharmacy. In fact, 81 per cent of the community pharmacies in which the College has done pharmacy assessments in the last three years report that they do not have pharmacy technicians working to scope on an average day.

At its meeting in June, Council received a presentation on an integrated Scope of Practice Strategy, and endorsed the following elements:

1. Create an Advisory Committee to inform, support, align and identify partnerships with stakeholders.
2. Define best-practice models, and create a community of best practices to help facilitate growth.
3. Identify barriers and facilitators impacting utilization of pharmacy technicians to optimize pharmacist scope.
4. Establish an education and training agenda for entry and continuing education to enhance professional engagement for both professions.
5. Develop quality indicators to measure the impact of collaborative practice models on clinical pharmacy services and patient outcomes.

Council will receive regular progress updates as the Strategy is implemented.

PTSA receives grant for five-year anniversary of regulation

THE ALBERTA COLLEGE OF PHARMACISTS (ACP) has presented the Pharmacy Technician Society of Alberta (PTSA) with a $25,000 professional development grant, in recognition of the five-year anniversary of pharmacy technicians becoming a regulated health profession in that province.

PTSA surveyed Alberta pharmacy technicians to determine how best to invest the grant. “The PTSA board knew that deciding how the grant would be spent was an important decision, and looked to Alberta pharmacy technicians to share their ideas,” says Laura Miskimins, PTSA president. “Responses to a survey conducted earlier this year for that purpose identified that pharmacy technicians want access to more online and self-study types of education opportunities. At this time, the grant money has not yet been allocated to one specific project, but PTSA is putting significant effort into creating an education plan supported by a Web-based learning platform that will improve the availability of CE to pharmacy technicians across the province.”

ACP Council president Taciana Pereira presented the award at a reception celebrating the milestone. “Our commitment to pharmacy technicians, regardless of practice environment, is to continue supporting their professional practice journey and ensure that they have the understanding, tools and knowledge to confidently perform at a high level,” she said. “In fact, one of our five goals in our five-year strategic plan is to increase the integration of pharmacy technicians into pharmacy practice teams, to allow them to exercise responsibility for the roles they are authorized to do.”
ACP publishes opioid guidance document for techs

IN LIGHT OF RECENT CHANGES TO THE Canadian Guidelines for Opioids for Non-Cancer Pain, the Alberta College of Pharmacists (ACP) Council has approved a guidance document to support the practice of pharmacy technicians and pharmacists.

While four of the five key requirements outlined in the document pertain specifically to pharmacists, the fifth says: “Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians must monitor individuals for the signs of opioid misuse, diversion or addiction, and take appropriate action.”

If the technician identifies signs of opioid misuse or addiction, he or she should notify the pharmacist, who will then take the following steps: collaborate with other members of the individual’s healthcare team to determine an appropriate course of action; provide education to the individual as necessary; and refer the individual to appropriate addiction resources and/or other practitioners specializing in management of addiction.

Pharmacy technicians must also work to prevent opioid diversion, says the document, by:
• taking reasonable steps to determine if the prescription is authentic and has not been altered, forged, or stolen;
• taking reasonable steps to verify the identity of the individual or his/her agent;
• checking triplicate prescriptions against the stolen or missing triplicate list; and
• ensuring safe use and storage by instructing individuals to:
  - Store opioid medications in a location where they are not accessible to others. When possible, opioid medications should be kept locked up to secure them from theft.
  - Return unused medications to the pharmacy for safe disposal.

ACP will be publishing separate articles on each of the five requirements in its newsletter “The Link,” at https://pharmacists.ab.ca/links.

The new Canadian guidelines will become requirements of all pharmacy professionals starting October 1.
ACETAMINOPHEN IS WIDELY USED IN Canada to treat pain and fever. While it is most commonly known by the brand name Tylenol, more than 700 over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription medicines contain acetaminophen, says Health Canada. These include medications to treat muscle pain, allergies, cold and flu, and menstrual symptoms.

The drug is safe and effective when used as directed, but there is a limit to how much should be taken in one day. According to the Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada (ISMP Canada), acetaminophen has been identified as the leading cause of liver failure in Canada; approximately 4,500 Canadians are hospitalized for acetaminophen overdose annually, and about six per cent of these patients experience liver injury that may be irreversible.

Alice Watt, a pharmacist as well as medication safety specialist at ISMP Canada, says community pharmacy technicians and assistants can help prevent overdoses by drawing patients’ attention to medications that contain acetaminophen, whether in a prescription drug or OTC medication. “If the pharmacy technician or assistant notices that a patient has a product that contains acetaminophen, they could flag it to the pharmacist for counsel, or offer the patient the brochure ‘Let’s talk about acetaminophen’, available on Health Canada’s acetaminophen information webpage at https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/drugs-health-products/let-s-talk-about-acetaminophen.html.

“For example, every time you give out a Tylenol 1 bottle, you can provide that pamphlet with it,” Watt suggests.

Hospital pharmacy technicians can also play an important safety role when performing a Best Possible Medication History (BPMH), by asking patients about any OTC drugs they are taking regularly. “BPMH is something that med rec technicians do,” says Watt. “If the patient is taking an OTC drug that contains acetaminophen, ask how many they would take on average per day,” Watt suggests. “That’s an important piece of information. I usually ask: ‘On a really bad day, how many would you take? How many have you taken recently?’ Because that might be a factor as to why they’re in the hospital.”

While it’s not always possible in a community pharmacy setting to flag patients purchasing OTC products that contain acetaminophen, technicians and assistants who seize any opportunity to do so will be making a significant contribution to safer use of these medications.

RESOURCES

• Health Canada webpage on acetaminophen: https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medical-devices/acetaminophen.html
• Spotlight on acetaminophen, ISMP Canada: https://safemedicationuse.ca/tools_resources/tips_acetaminophen.html

FIVE QUESTIONS FOR PATIENTS TO ASK
ISMP Canada has collaborated with the Canadian Pharmacists Association, the Canadian Society for Hospital Pharmacists, Canadian Patient Safety Institute, and Patients for Patient Safety Canada to develop a set of five questions to help patients and caregivers start a conversation about medications with their healthcare provider, as follows:

1. Changes? Have any medications been added, stopped or changed, and why?
2. Continue? What medications do I need to keep taking, and why?
3. Proper use? How do I take my medication, and for how long?
4. Monitor? How will I know if my medication is working, and what side effects do I watch for?
5. Follow-up? Do I need any tests, and when do I book my next visit?

Watt says pharmacy technicians and assistants can promote safe medication use by introducing this tool to patients. “That should prompt patients to ask these questions of their pharmacist,” she says.

“Acetaminophen falls into the proper use question,” adds Watt. “How do I properly use this medicine that has acetaminophen in it? And what to monitor.”

Pharmacies can download a printable form of “The Five Questions” for distribution, and include their logo upon request, at https://www.ismp-canada.org/medrec/5questions.htm.
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