

TECH talk

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2012

BY THE NUMBERS

1,324 pharmacy technicians registered with the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada (PEBC),

56 registered technicians in British Columbia,

26 registered technicians in Alberta, and

398 registered technicians in Ontario.

The PEBC registers technicians who have passed all its requirements, and the provinces issue the licenses when their criteria have been met as well.

There is a significant disparity between the number of registrants with PEBC and the total number of registered technicians in the provinces, for a few reasons. Candidates may not have written their jurisprudence exam yet. They might be waiting for their results. Or perhaps they have fulfilled all the requirements, but have not yet applied for their license.

Nova Scotia should be the next province to turn out registered technicians. The province is holding its first qualifying exam—which consists of a written multiple-choice test and the Objective Structured Performance Exam—in March of this year. Newfoundland and Manitoba are holding their first evaluating exam, which helps potential candidates assess their current knowledge levels, in April.

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TECH TAKES ON TEACHING

Road to regulation leads to teaching opportunity for Ontario technician

AS A MEMBER OF THE INAUGURAL GROUP OF REGULATED TECHNICIANS, Delia Littlejohn has made the most of the opportunities that have arisen as a result of her achievements.

A stay-at-home mom for nine years, Littlejohn re-entered the workforce upon graduating as a pharmacy assistant in 2005, and was hired to work in a newly built Walmart store in her hometown of Strathroy, Ont.

Eager for advancement, in 2008 she enrolled in the bridging courses being piloted at Lambton College in Sarnia. By late 2009, she had fulfilled all the requirements, but had to wait until December 2010—when the appropriate legislation was enacted—to be awarded her license. Still, the waiting game continued, this time for the publication of the scope of practice that would clarify technicians' expanded responsibilities.

Meanwhile, Catherine Schuster, coordinator of the pharmacy technician program at Lambton College and Littlejohn's instructor, asked Littlejohn if she would like to teach the bridging courses. Because there were not enough students at the time, Littlejohn instead taught online courses for Sheridan College for two terms. "It was an interesting way to integrate into teaching because it's all done by email," she says. "It was a good experience."

By fall of 2010, Littlejohn was teaching at Lambton while still working full-time at Walmart. In February 2011, when Schuster asked her to become coordinator of the pharmacy technician bridging program, she left Walmart and began teaching 22 hours a week.

"It was so satisfying for me, getting the opportunity to cultivate new techs, to have somebody see a quality in me that they felt

was warranted to pass on to others," she says.

Over the recent holiday break, however, her career took an unexpected turn when she was recruited for a technician position at Classic Care Pharmacy in London, Ont. Facing reduced teaching hours for the coming term—one of the challenges of teaching, she explains, is the necessity to negotiate a new contract for hours each semester—she accepted the job offer. Although she is no longer teaching day classes at Lambton, she

remains coordinator of the bridging program, and will teach as needed.

She believes that being back on the frontlines of retail pharmacy will make her a better teacher. "In my opinion, a good instructor is someone who also works in the field, because pharmacy is such a changing profession. There are always new things [happening], and I started to feel out of the loop."

At her new job, she will be able to practise to the full extent of her license, she says. And thanks to her teaching background, she will also have the opportunity to do some workplace training.

Littlejohn advises technicians to be patient as phar-

macies gradually implement the full scope of practice. "We're part of a new profession," she says, "and like anything new, it's going to take two to five years to really sink in [so that we can] start to reap the benefits." In the meantime, she adds that technicians should take the initiative to speak freely with their managers and keep the lines of communication open about moving forward in their roles.

She credits Walmart with setting her on her career path. "I had a fantastic pharmacy manager there, and each place I've been or thing I've done has been a stepping stone to where I am and where I'm continuing to go."



Regulated tech Delia Littlejohn is now educating aspiring registrants

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NATIONAL NEWS

NAPRA releases standards of practice for technicians

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS of the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA) has approved the Model Standards of Practice for Canadian Pharmacy Technicians.

That means that the job of a regulated pharmacy technician will be harmonized across the country, says NAPRA president David McLeod.

"You don't want a regulated technician who has worked in one province and wants to move to another one to make that move then find out that the job is vastly different in the (new) province," says McLeod, pharmacy manager of Lawtons Drugs at the Sherwood Centre in Charlottetown, PEI. "There are obviously going to be provincial rules and regulations and laws that will vary, but for the most part, it should be a relatively smooth transition for technicians to move from one province to another."

The standards will also help those provinces that have not yet begun, or that are in the early stages of, the process of regulation.

Members are free to adopt the standards as they are, or adapt them to meet their province's needs, says McLeod. The standards represent the minimum criteria that regulated technicians in each province must meet.

Technicians, initially through the Canadian

Association of Pharmacy Technicians and later through various provincial stakeholders, provided input to the document, which was developed over the past year by NAPRA's National Committee on Regulated Pharmacy Technicians. McLeod says that the committee used the Model Standards of Practice for Pharmacists as a basis, modifying it to reflect the more technical duties of pharmacy technicians. "The documents look similar in the way they're laid out and the way they're organized, but the content is considerably different." The Model Standards of Practice will be posted on NAPRA's website at www.napra.org.

At press time, NAPRA was working with Health Canada to make changes to the Food and Drug Regulations to enable the full implementation of the scope of practice, including prescription transfers. "I think pharmacists are so excited about getting regulated pharmacy technicians who will be able to do some of the functions that normally the pharmacist has to do, enabling pharmacists to also change their scopes of practice to do other things," says McLeod. "It's a very, very exciting time in this profession, and I can't wait until the regulated pharmacy technicians come to my province."

ONTARIO NEWS

Ontario to step up pharmacist injection/immunization program

INCREASING NUMBERS OF PHARMACISTS in Ontario are applying for certification to administer injections and immunizations. As of December 2011, 120 pharmacists had completed the program, which to that point had been offered twice with a limit of 60 par-

communications, at the OPA.

The ability of pharmacists to administer injections and immunizations will provide an opportunity for pharmacy assistants and technicians to expand their roles, particularly in the area of logistics, says McNorgan. For example, they could perform a variety of tasks, including pre-injection registration (consent forms); data entry, both pre- and post-injection; billing; inventory management, including maintaining cold-chain integrity; scheduling for flu-shot clinics; and overseeing the waiting room post-injection to ensure there are no reactions to the drug.

The OPA launched the immunization and injection program at its annual conference in June. However, pharmacists are still waiting for the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to grant them full immunization rights. The Ontario College of Pharmacists is developing the enabling regulations for the government's review, revision, and approval, with input from the OPA.

Currently, qualified pharmacists in Alberta, British Columbia, and New Brunswick can administer injections and immunizations.



ticipants per session. However, the Ontario Pharmacists Association (OPA) hopes to offer more sessions to meet the demand for certification, says Deborah McNorgan, director,

Have meds, will travel

AS WINTER CONTINUES TO HOLD CANADA

in its icy grip, our thoughts often turn to warmer climes. How about March break in Punta Cana? Or perhaps hiking to Machu Picchu? Whatever their travel tastes may be, your patients shouldn't head south—or anywhere else—without the appropriate vaccinations and medications, both prescription and over-the-counter (OTC).



The pharmacy team has a major role to play in protecting patients against potential travel health risks.

The most common preventive medicine is Twinrix injectable vaccine for hepatitis A and B, says Sharalyn Rigby, relief pharmacist for Sobeys Inc in Saint John, NB. Areas of higher risk for hepatitis A include parts of Central America, South America, Africa, and Asia, while the risk for hepatitis B is high in parts of the Caribbean—including the vacation mecca of the Dominican Republic—as well as Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East (except Israel), and South and Western Pacific Islands. The standard vaccination schedule consists of three doses. With increasing numbers of pharmacists becoming certified to administer injections and immunizations, travellers may welcome the convenience of receiving the injection right at the pharmacy upon purchasing the refrigerated vaccine.

Rigby says the use of Dukoral, an oral vaccine that is taken in two doses to help prevent travellers' diarrhea, is also becoming increasingly common among visitors to developing countries.

Antimalarial medication may also be required or strongly recommended, says Rigby. "We see a lot of that nowadays, more for Dominican Republic." Rigby, who enjoys taking adventure vacations, says she never travels without antidiarrheals, antinauseants, and antihistamines in the event of an unanticipated allergic reaction. She also brings OTC

pain medications, and, because she travels to remote areas, oral rehydration salts, which she says can be "life-saving" should she suffer from dehydration.

According to Rigby, the role of pharmacy assistants and technicians is "absolutely incredible" when it comes to travel meds. Because assistants are on the front lines when the prescription is dropped off, they can take note of any travel-related medications and ask the patient if he or she would like the pharmacist to recommend some other OTC products. In the case of injectable vaccines, they can offer to have the pharmacist administer the injection if that service is provided. Many of the vaccines require booster shots to retain the immunity, so assistants can remind patients when their vaccine is due and book appointments to have the shots administered in the pharmacy.

Assistants and technicians can bone up

on travel-health recommendations at Health Canada's website www.travel.gc.ca, and also refer patients there. The site features links to the Public Health Agency of Canada's Travel Medicine Program for information on vaccinations, as well as diseases and health conditions prevalent in foreign countries.

Rigby urges assistants to ask patients where they're travelling to when they drop off their prescriptions. "Write it down on their prescription, and if they're interested in some extra information, the pharmacist can provide that for them," she says. "They're getting both counselling on their prescription plus extra information on top of that about the area they're going to. With travel clinics and travel vaccines ... pharmacy assistants are so important in identifying people who would benefit from [advice of any kind]. That's why it's such a great team environment."

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