

TECH talk

MARCH 2013

ONTARIO REACHES 1,000 REGISTERED TECHS

The number of registered technicians in Ontario has reached the 1,000 mark—and counting, according to an article titled “Different Settings, Shared Rewards” in the Winter 2013 issue of *Pharmacy Connection*, a publication of the Ontario College of Pharmacists.

Of the first 1,000 registered techs, 95% are women, with an average age of 39 years, 67% of them work in an urban setting, 16% in a suburban location, and 17% in a rural area, says the article. Fifty-four percent of technicians work in a community pharmacy, 37% in a hospital, and 9% elsewhere. Of those working in a community pharmacy, 37% are in a chain pharmacy, 34% in an independent pharmacy, and 29% in a franchise or banner pharmacy.

London, Mississauga, Barrie, Brampton, and Kitchener are the five areas outside Toronto with the most technicians.

Another article in the same issue, titled “Understanding What a Technician Can Do—Key to Integration,” notes that technicians are responsible for the technical aspects of both new and refill prescriptions (ie, the correct patient, drug dosage form/route dose, doctor). Each completed prescription must contain the signature of both the technician (for the technical functions) and the pharmacist (for the therapeutic functions). Technicians are permitted to accept verbal prescriptions (except for narcotics and controlled drug substances). Once changes to the Food and Drug Act regulations are in place, technicians will also be able to independently receive and provide prescription transfers.

“[U]nderstanding technicians’ scope ... and standards of practice is a key step in identifying the best way to integrate these valuable members of the health care team into your pharmacy practice,” the article concludes.

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TECH USES MANAGEMENT SKILLS TO RUN DRUG DISTRIBUTION CENTRE

WHEN DANA LYONS GRADUATED FROM Alberta’s Red Deer College in 1995 as a pharmacy technician, little did she know that eight years later she would be managing a drug distribution centre with some 100 employees.

As facility production manager for Alberta Health Services’ Central Production Facility, a centralized drug production facility that is the first of its kind, Lyons is responsible for maximizing use of the equipment and keeping everything running smoothly on both the oral solids and sterile compounding sides. She supervises approximately 60 pharmacy technicians while another manager oversees some 30 assistants.

It was a decade ago, when working at a regional hospital in Lethbridge, that Lyons spotted an ad for a technical manager to help open up the brand new facility and manage the staff and the processes. “It looked like a good opportunity,” she says. “It hadn’t been done anywhere in Canada before. I was pretty young at the time and ambitious, and felt like I was already outgrowing rotational jobs and wanted something a little bit more.”

To hone her management skills, Lyons has been taking a Bachelor of Management degree through Athabasca University for the past two years, averaging a course per semester. “I wanted to enhance my current position,” she explains.

But she hasn’t stopped there. She’s also one of only two pharmacy staff at Alberta Health Services who has completed the Black Belt program in Lean Six Sigma training, which teaches continuous improvement and streamlining of processes. “This place was built on efficiency,” she says of the facility. “We really try to focus on getting more product through [as efficiently as] possible, whether that means using automation where our financials can support it, or just making sure there is a standard process. We are always trying to reduce costs where possible and make the processes better.” With the addition of more hospital beds, the distribution centre has had to keep pace over the past 10 years.

Efficiency and patient safety are at the heart of everything in the Central Production Facility. One of Lyons’ biggest challenges is to



Photo: Jeanette Castillo

learn—and make others understand—that the facility is not simply a large hospital pharmacy, but rather a distribution centre, and must operate accordingly, particularly with respect to safety. After all, the centre provides nursing ward stock for nearly 700 clinics a week on an on-demand basis.

Fortunately, Lyons says she is supported by a “fantastic” staff who step up to any challenge and care deeply about their customers. “I am completely humbled by the people I work with,” she says. “I see myself as the tool so that they can do a great job.”

As a registered technician and an instructor in the bridging program at Bow Valley College, Lyons believes registration will help promote standardization in the work force. However, she notes there is “room for improvement” in the use of technicians. “Pharmacists are going to have to make some room for regulated techs in terms of responsibility. I think pharmacy techs should be leading the charge in operations as they become regulated. They know that work best.”

While Lyons enjoys a great deal of responsibility in her current position—“I would sign up for this job again tomorrow,” she enthuses—she hopes to parlay her management skills and operational experience into some kind of logistics role in health care. “I think as consolidation happens in many centres, there is room to apply some lean principles and good management and operational experience across different aspects of health care.”

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An educational service for Canadian pharmacy technicians, brought to you by Teva www.tevacanada.com



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TECH TALK and TECH TALK CE are published by
Pharmacy Practice magazine, a division of Rogers
Publishing Ltd., One Mount Pleasant Road, 7th Floor,
Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2Y5.

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NEWS

CAPT gears up for landmark PDC

THIS IS A MILESTONE YEAR FOR THE Canadian Association of Pharmacy Technicians (CAPT) as it celebrates the 30th anniversary of its founding.

The 2013 Professional Development Conference (PDC), to be held May 24–26 at the Delta Vancouver Airport Hotel in Vancouver, BC, promises to be a fitting tribute to the occasion.

Some of the topics at this year's event

include a professional update for technicians, compounding, addiction, mental health, diabetes, and a panel discussion on the future roles of pharmacy technicians. Delegates will also have the opportunity to visit with exhibitors and network with colleagues during refreshment breaks and meals, including a gala dinner.

For more information, visit www.capt.ca.

PTSA focuses on education

WHILE THE PHARMACY TECHNICIAN Society of Alberta (PTSA) offers its members many programs and benefits, education continues to be a priority. Over the past year, the organization has partnered with Lisa Dare, BScPharm, to host OSPE (Objective Structured Practical Examination) workshops across the province. "This has provided pharmacy technicians in Alberta an opportunity to better ready themselves for their PEBC Qualifying Examinations," says Nicholas Burns, PTSA vice-president. "As long as there is a need for these types of workshops, we will continue to organize them."

On another front, PTSA offers a "Techs in Touch" continuing education series. These sessions are held every month or two in Calgary and Edmonton to help keep technicians up to date with their practice. Recent sessions have covered such topics as antipsychotics, overdosing of prescription drugs, the meeting of conventional and unconventional medicine, and chemotherapy.

Planning is now underway for the 23rd Annual Pharmacy Technician Conference, to be held at the Cree Casino in Edmonton from September 20–21.

For more information on the PTSA, visit pharmacytechnicians.ab.ca.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

APRIL 5–7

Manitoba Pharmacy Conference
Winnipeg Convention Centre

CONTACT: www.mbpharmacyconference.com

APRIL 27

31st Annual Pharmacy Technicians Conference
Theme: Breakthrough to Rxcellence
Humber College, Toronto

CONTACT: www.humber.ca/conference/pharmacy

MAY 3–5

Pharmacists' Association of Saskatchewan
Annual Conference
Elkridge Resort, Waskesui, Sask.

CONTACT: www.skpharmacists.ca/events-and-education/pas-annual-conference

MAY 24–26

PDC 2013, Canadian Association of Pharmacy
Technicians Professional Development
Conference

Delta Vancouver Airport Hotel, Vancouver, BC
CONTACT: http://capt.ca/Capt_PDC_2013.aspx

JUNE 20–22

Ontario Pharmacists' Association Annual
Convention
Metro Toronto Convention Centre

CONTACT: www.opatoday.com/index.php/opa/events/conference.html

SEPTEMBER 20–21

23rd Annual Alberta Pharmacy Technician
Conference
River Cree Resort and Casino, Edmonton, Alta.

CONTACT: www.pharmacytechnicians.ab.ca/page_conferences.php?op=view&id=225

SEPTEMBER 21

5th Pharmacy Technicians Breaking Barriers
Conference
WFCU Centre, Windsor, Ont.

CONTACT: www.phtconference.com

OCTOBER 18–20

7th Annual Newfoundland and Labrador
Pharmacy Technician Conference
Gander, NL

CONTACT: [Lois Battcock, pharmacytechconference@hotmail.ca](mailto:Lois_Battcock_pharmacytechconference@hotmail.ca)

OCTOBER 25–26

8th Annual Conference of Pharmacy
Technician Society of British Columbia (PTSBC)
Delta Hotel and Conference Centre, Burnaby, BC

CONTACT: www.ptsbc.ca

Making the most of registered techs

IN THE NEW WORLD OF REGISTERED

technicians, pharmacists and technicians are looking to manage their workflow so pharmacists have more time for counselling and technicians can work to the full extent of their scope of practice. But there is no blueprint to follow. "Because it's new, we're creating it as we go," says Rachelle Rocha, senior director of pharmacy at Loblaw Companies Ltd.

Registered technicians should be performing two major roles, says Rocha: quality assurance checks of both regular prescriptions and bubble packs, provided the pharmacist checks the therapeutics of the packs every time a drug is changed or every three months. Having technicians check the bubble packs "has been probably the biggest time saver in our pharmacy business," she says.

However, there may not be enough volume in one pharmacy to allow the technician to perform these duties exclusively. Therefore, Loblaw employs some of its registered techs at different pharmacies in a geographical area, so they can check bubble packs one day a week at each location. "You have to have enough work for them to do within their scope," says Rocha. "There's no point hiring a registered technician to do the same thing that the assistants and clerks are doing."

Although, that may not be possible for an independent with one store. In that case, says Rocha, "you probably just bite the bullet, pay them more, and try to give them as much work within their scope as you can."

Rocha advises registered technicians to "take a really active role" in training the person who will replace them. "Even though technicians are supposed to be checking, they end up getting stuck at the inputting station because they haven't made sure that the other people at the dispensary are competent at that station," she says. "And if you're order entering, you really shouldn't be checking. It's against best practices. You need two sets of eyeballs looking at a prescription ideally."

Another hurdle for technicians is pharmacists who are reluctant to cede additional responsibilities to them. Pharmacists must get used to performing only therapeutic checks, rather than quality assurance checks, says Rocha. "It's a bit of a mind shift for them."

She advises technicians who face that obstacle to volunteer for anything they can own, because the pharmacist might not think to assign it to them. "Offer to take over tasks

that the pharmacists may not realize that they are clinging to, but really should give up."

Both parties will benefit. Pharmacies that have made maximum use of technicians perform many more MedsChecks, notes Rocha. "The whole goal of having the registered tech is to allow pharmacists to have more time to talk to patients, so we can do more MedsChecks, so we can call more doctors and sort things out, so that we can exercise the professional scope," she says. "The technician can own the efficient managing of the dispensary process. The pharmacist really just needs to stand at the counselling space, at the drop-off talking to patients, in the OTC

aisle, or at the pick-up end of things."

Admittedly, not everyone is comfortable with these changes in practice "but we're relying especially on this first group of people who got certified," says Rocha. "We need to empower them as much as we can. The pharmacists need to seriously consider how to delegate more and how to trust other people to do those tasks, and the technicians need to try and take on more, but in a respectful manner."

Communication is key. "Have a meeting," Rocha urges. "Explain what everybody's role is. Make sure you hold people accountable to their new role."

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