

TECH talk

SEPTEMBER 2011

HOSPITAL TECHS IN ONTARIO UNIONIZE

One hundred and thirteen pharmacy technicians at the three hospitals that comprise the University Health Network (UHN) have joined the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU). In a vote held May 26, the technicians voted 92% in favour of joining OPSEU. They work out of three sites in Toronto—Princess Margaret Hospital, Toronto General Hospital, and Toronto Western Hospital.

“With all the changes happening with pharmacy technicians, these new UHN members will benefit from the stability that comes with belonging to OPSEU and our Hospital Professionals Division,” says Sara Labelle, chair of the HPD.

According to Tracey Mussett, the OPSEU organizer who worked with the technician group, wages was not the major reason why the technicians approached the union. Rather, their decision was “largely related to how they felt they were being treated generally” in dealing with management. “The issue of their having to join the [Ontario] College [of Pharmacists] was also brought up,” she says.

The Ontario government has imposed a two-year wage freeze for public-sector employees who do not bargain collectively during bargaining issues. This creates pay inequities between unionized and non-unionized workers that Mussett says OPSEU will also address during bargaining of the issues that led the technicians to contact the union.

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PHARMACY TECHNICIAN TAKES ON MANAGERIAL ROLE

WHEN THE WINNIPEG REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY (WRHA) offered a supervisory skills course for pharmacy technicians two years ago, Christina Santos jumped at the chance to participate. One of 15 chosen to take the course, she is now Pharmacy Technician Manager, Purchasing/Warehouse/Financial Systems Support for WRHA Health Sciences Centre (HSC) in Winnipeg, a vast complex spanning 20 acres.

With responsibility for inventory management, Santos supervises a staff of six inventory systems technicians and one pharmacy aide for all human resources issues. She also manages the pharmacy purchasing and inventory warehouse, as well as the technical systems, for the HSC pharmacy department. While the technicians she supervises are currently confined to one job function within the pharmacy or warehouse, Santos is in the process of forming a “good working purchasing inventory group” who will be able to perform all the duties, so that each has an understanding of what the others do.

Santos is one of seven pharmacy technician managers, and one of four at the HSC; the other three work in paediatric investigational drugs, sterile admixtures and inpatient pharmacy departments. “We each have our own portfolios, but we work together,” she explains. “We are considered a drug distribution management team.” She reports to the regional pharmacy drug distribution manager, a pharmacist at one of the regional hospitals.

While she says it was initially challenging to gain acceptance in the pharmacy for the concept of pharmacy technician managers, the position has freed up the pharmacists who were previously performing that function to do more clinical work. And after all, “who better to manage pharmacy technicians than pharmacy technicians?” says Santos.



“When you put various individual strengths together, you have an awesome team of professionals working together,” says pharmacy technician Christina Santos.

Before getting her current job, Santos worked in several different capacities. Following her technician training at Winnipeg South Technical Centre in 1994-95, she worked in the pharmacy at a medical clinic, and then a community pharmacy. While still working in retail, she started at a hospital pharmacy. In 1998, she joined the HSC paediatric inpatient pharmacy, where she spent 11 years before becoming a pharmacy technician manager in 2009.

What she enjoys most about her job is coping with the various challenges that arise daily. “Each one has a different twist to it, whether it’s a drug shortage, an issue with a co-worker—every day there’s a new challenge, and I think what keeps me together is working with the other managers, building a team of managers and being on the same page, whether it’s a pharmacy manager or a technician manager.”

While the supervisory skills course presented Santos with a unique opportunity for career advancement, she says every pharmacy technician has a personal strength that he or she brings to the workplace. She urges technicians to find the aspect of their job at which they excel, and “run with that.” As she points out, “when you put various individual strengths together, you have an awesome team of professionals working together to achieve a common goal.”

This fall, Santos will take the evaluating exam in the first step towards regulation, a process that is just beginning in Manitoba. She is looking forward to taking on yet another challenge in her fulfilling career.

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Do you read the Tech Talk Newsletter? *

- Often Sometimes
 Rarely Never

If "rarely" or "never" why? *

- Don't receive it regularly
 Don't know how to receive it
 Don't find it relevant to my workplace

How often do you do Tech Talk CEs? *

- 5 or more per year 4 per year
 3 per year 2 per year
 1 per year Never

How do you receive the Tech Talk newsletter and CE? *

- I receive a print version directly
 I receive a print version from a pharmacist
 I go online to access it
 Both, I go online and receive a print version

What do you like best about the Tech Talk newsletter? (check all that apply)

- Provincial news
 Regulatory news
 Profiles of technicians
 Tech refresher

Other:

What do you like best about the Tech Talk CE? (check all that apply)

- Topic relevance to my workplace
 Ease of use
 Online accessibility of the lessons

What topics would you like to read about in the Tech Talk newsletter? *

What topics would you like to learn about in the Tech Talk CE?

Who sponsors Tech Talk newsletter and CE? *

- Apotex Cobalt
 Pharmascience Teva
 Sandoz I don't know

What level of influence (or responsibility) do you currently have in pharmaceutical buying decisions in your pharmacy? *

- High Medium
 Low None

Do you think regulation will give pharmacy technicians more responsibility in pharmaceutical buying decisions? *

- Yes No Not sure

Has your awareness of the sponsor of Tech Talk CE and newsletter influenced your purchasing decisions? *

- Yes No
 I am not involved in purchasing decisions

Would you say your level of influence has increased, decreased or remained the same compared to three years ago? *

- Increased Decreased
 Remained the same

In your pharmacy, what would you say are the most important functions for regulated or licensed pharmacy technicians? (Check all that apply)

- Dispensing prescriptions
 Drug distribution/inventory management
 Third-party drug plan issues
 Gathering drug/medical safety information
 Support for expanded services
 General follow-up with patients
 General follow-up with physicians
 Maintenance of patient-care documentation
 Specialty compounding

Other:

Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Questions marked with an asterisk * require a response to be entered in the draw.

Healing powers: A primer on wound care

WE'VE ALL AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER

suffered minor cuts and scrapes, not to mention those pesky insect bites and stings.

Technicians who bone up on the basics of wound care can help with the healing process when patients come looking for relief.

When it comes to superficial wounds, the key is to keep them clean, says Les Johnson, chief executive officer, federal district council, for St. John Ambulance in Ottawa. He recommends using warm, soapy water. Wash your own hands with soap or put on gloves before cleaning the wound. Don't cough or breathe directly over it. Gently wash loose material from the surface, wiping away from the wound. Johnson says the most recent first-aid guidelines recommend an antibiotic cream for superficial wounds and abrasions. Then cover the wound with a sterile dressing, and change the dressing as needed.

Do not put alcohol on wounds, cautions Colleen Cairncross, a staff pharmacist at Sinclair Pharmacy in Stratford, Ont., who also works on the standards setting committee of the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada. Many people do so in the mistaken belief that it speeds up the healing process, whereas it has the opposite effect, she says.

It is important to watch for signs that the wound may not be healing properly. Johnson uses the acronym "SHARP" as a reminder: Swollen, Hot, Aches, Redness, Pus. Any of those symptoms could signify infection. Other warning signs that require referral to the pharmacist or a doctor include rash, fever and chills, says Cairncross. If the skin is red and has small brown or yellow scabs, that could signify impetigo, she says, which is a common, highly contagious bacterial skin infection.

In the case of insect stings, Johnson advises using a credit card or butter knife to scrape out the stinger. He warns against trying to squeeze or pull out the stinger with tweezers, since the poison sack may still be attached to it, and that will only push it in further. "If it's a bit painful, we recommend a paste of baking soda and water to help remove some of the irritation," he adds.

There are several ways in which technicians can assist patients and pharmacists with wound-care management. First, they can question patients about any symptoms to report to the pharmacist. Cairncross says technicians should be able to recognize when a wound is simple enough for the patient to treat at home. "[Pharmacy technicians] should also be able to give people the basics of infection prevention," she says. For example, if a patient comes in with a cut or a wound, "just be able to advise them to clean

it every day with a gentle cleanser and cover it until it heals."

She also recommends that technicians be able to recognize the warning signs that would necessitate referral to the pharmacist or a doctor.

For those pharmacies that have follow-up programs for patients on new prescriptions, technicians can keep track of which follow-up calls need to be made, and supply the pharmacist with those names and phone numbers, says Cairncross. In the case of wound care, this would apply to patients who have been prescribed an antibiotic.

Pharmacy technicians have an important role to play in helping to ensure that a minor wound doesn't turn into a major pain.



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