

TECH talk

JUNE 2011

MEMBERSHIP SOARS FOR QUEBEC PHARMACY TECHNICIAN ASSOCIATION

Years of hard work by the Association québécoise des assistant(e)s techniques en pharmacie (AQATP) has paid off in a huge increase in membership.

In 2005, the AQATP was a small organization with only 300 members, almost all from hospital pharmacies. Six years later, the organization counts 2,000 members. According to AQATP President Louise Sénécal, this is due in large part to higher recruitment from community pharmacies.

She explains that the increase in members from community pharmacies can be attributed to the fact that chains and banners believe that their techs can benefit from the role played by the AQATP.

Sénécal also points out that the Association has forged closer bonds in recent years with the Quebec Order of Pharmacists, the Quebec Association of Health Institution Pharmacists and the Quebec Association of Pharmacist Owners.

"Some had the mistaken impression that we were a union, when in reality we're an association with the objective of developing the pharmacy technician trade," says Sénécal. "The conference the AQATP organizes every year is the best example of that."

The most recent AQATP conference took place from May 13 to 15 in Laval. In addition to clinical topics, the 300 participants held discussions on task-sharing between pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

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AWARD-WINNING EFFORT

Tech takes top honours for professionalism

LORNA KUBLIK NEVER THINKS TWICE

about going above and beyond the call of duty when it comes to her work at the Cross Cancer Institute pharmacy in Edmonton. Whether it is developing poster presentations, organizing Pharmacy Awareness Week, helping produce a public video, or serving on committees, Kublik is up to the task.

And, she fits all these extra activities into a busy schedule that includes working full-time as an inventory-management technician, studying to become a regulated technician, and raising two children.

So it is not surprising that Kublik was chosen as the 2011 recipient of the PTSA Professionalism Award. Sponsored by the Pharmacy Technician Society of Alberta, the Award is intended "to recognize pharmacy technicians and assistants for their commitment to professionalism through commitment to pharmacy practice."

Karen Keppes, her fellow technician who nominated her for the honour, says, "Lorna is enthusiastic about everything she is involved with, including a busy family life, pharmacy technician bridging course enrolment and working fulltime as a pharmacy technician."

Kublik, a graduate of Alberta's Red Deer College, has been in her current job for eight years. She enjoys working in inventory management because she gets "a thrill out of saving money." Her goal is to "reduce drug wastage in our sterile room, so you give only as much product that is required for that preparation."

But as frugal as Kublik is with hospital funds, she is generous with her time. She regularly organizes Pharmacy Awareness Week activities at the hospital, even creating a *Jeopardy* game that she says was "a great learning tool for our department."



2011 PTSA Professionalism Award recipient Lorna Kublik

She also collaborated with a co-worker on a poster for the International Society of Oncology Pharmacy Practitioners (ISOPP) that she was asked to present at the Society's international conference. Delegates were "quite interested in the cost savings part of what we discovered of our oncology drugs, and ways of saving money and monitoring the values in the computer versus what's on the shelf," she says.

To increase public awareness of what happens behind the scenes at the pharmacy, she helped assistant director Roxanne Dobish produce a short video showing how an injectable chemotherapy order goes through the process, and all the safety checks along the way. "We wanted to make the public aware that it's more than just pouring medications out of a bottle, counting it out, and putting a label on the bottle," she says.

Every two years, Kublik produces a cost-awareness poster to show other hospital workers how much certain protocols actually cost. She has also worked with Dobish to develop a policy and procedures manual for shipping chemotherapy drugs during seasonal and extreme weather. She is an active participant on safety-related pharmacy committees dealing with high-alert medications and look-alike sound-alike drugs.

Eventually, she would like to get even more involved in the safety aspects of her work to do "more of the projects part of things," she explains. "I really enjoy seeing things evolve, making improvements for our patient safety."

But always with an eagle eye on the public purse strings.

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NOVA SCOTIA NEWS

N.S. introduces legislation to regulate technicians

NOVA SCOTIA TOOK ANOTHER STEP towards pharmacy tech regulation with legislation to update the Pharmacy Act in April. Among other changes, the legislation will provide the authority for the Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists (NSCP) to register, license and regulate pharmacy techs. "We are updating the Pharmacy Act and regulating pharmacy technicians to provide better health care sooner to Nova Scotia families," says Maureen MacDonald, provincial Minister of Health and Wellness.

As of press time, the amended Act had passed the second of three readings. If it passes, the next step is to submit associated regulations to Cabinet, says Susan Wedlake, NSCP registrar. "It is really difficult to suggest when those regulations might be approved."

In January 2010, regulations came into effect enabling pharmacists in the province to refill, extend and adjust prescriptions, and to prescribe certain medications. Then in the fall of 2010, the N.S. government passed amendments to the existing law authorizing pharmacists to administer drugs—including vaccines—and order/interpret lab tests to monitor drug therapy. Regulations for these amendments are now being developed by the NSCP in collaboration with government and in consultation with pharmacists and other healthcare professions. They must still be finalized and approved by Cabinet and NSCP must also finalize the associated Standards of Practice, which it is currently developing, and get them approved by the NSCP Council, says Wedlake.

MANITOBA NEWS

Manitoba pharmacy conference provides tech element

THE MANITOBA REGIONAL EDUCATION Outreach Committee (REOC) of the Canadian Association of Pharmacy Technicians (CAPT) provided a full-day program for pharmacy technicians during the recent Manitoba Pharmacy Conference. This is the third year CAPT has participated in the three-day event, which took place in Winnipeg and was hosted in partnership with the Manitoba Society of Pharmacists, the Manitoba Pharmaceutical Association and the Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists (Manitoba Branch).

The first session by pharmacist Amy Oliver from Shoppers Drug Mart focused on the "Future and Changing Roles of Pharmacy Technicians." Oliver emphasized the need to embrace change and support the progression of our profession. With the ever-expanding role of the pharmacist moving forward, pharmacy technicians must step up to the challenge of filling the technical roles that were primarily performed by pharmacists. Pharmacy technician manager Christina Santos then talked about her new, diverse role being in charge of purchasing, warehousing and the financial system support for a large hospital within the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

Attendees also heard from Winnipeg-based long-term-care pharmacist Julie Choy, who spoke on the "Technicians' Roles in Improving Medication Adherence." The focus was on the important role techs play in the pharmaceutical care team, providing tools to identify where there could be non-adherence to medication regimes, and ways to open the lines of communication between the pharmacist and the customer to reach optimal patient care.

The Director of Education from the Mood Disorder Association of Manitoba Tina Holland spoke about "Living with Depression," captivat-



(L-R) Rose Dick, CAPT Manitoba REOC representative and Debra Chartier, CAPT director of internal affairs

ing the audience with her personal perspective. She offered insights to techs on how to better understand the positive effect that pharmaceutical treatment can have on the daily quality of life for patients dealing with this disease, and emphasized the importance of having healthy support systems in place.

The final speaker was registered dietitian Amanda Nash from the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Manitoba, who discussed how to identify unhealthy lifestyle choices. The overall message was to start a healthy lifestyle by setting short-term goals that are attainable so that individuals have the self-confidence to continue to work towards lifestyle changes.

The event attracted more than 70 attendees from various practice settings, as well as students from colleges offering tech programs in Winnipeg.

Please visit our website, www.capt.ca, for information on this event as well as many other networking opportunities.

—Rose Dick, provincial representative,
Manitoba REOC, CAPT

Medical Devices 101

DEPENDING ON THEIR TRAINING and responsibilities, pharmacy techs may be asked to demonstrate various medical devices to patients. Here is a brief overview of the more common ones to become familiar with.

Inhalers

Inhalers for asthma patients deliver medications directly to the site of inflammation and constriction in the airways. There are two types:

- **Aerosol inhaler:** a pressurized metered-dose inhaler, commonly called “puffer,” is a canister filled with asthma medication suspended in a propellant. When the canister is pushed down, a measured dose of the medication is pushed out as the patient breathes in.
- **Dry-powder inhaler:** contains a dry powder medication that is drawn into the lungs when the patient breathes in.



Peak flow meters

These devices for asthma patients estimate the Peak Expiratory Flow (PEF) Rate, a measure of the speed at which air can be exhaled from the lungs after inhaling a big breath. If asthma is causing airway inflammation or constriction, the peak flow levels will be lower.

There are two types of meters: Mechanical Peak Flow Meter, which measures the PEF; and Digital Asthma Monitor, which measures PEF and Forced Expiratory Volume in 1 second (FEV1), the volume of air expelled within the first second.

Blood glucose meters

These devices monitor blood glucose levels to help manage diabetes. The meter also requires disposable test strips and a lancet, which is a very fine needle in a spring-loaded pen device to make blood sampling easier. Test strips come in a disk or a cartridge format; different meters use different kinds of test strips. Some meters have to be calibrated by manually changing the code each time the patient starts a new package of strips, while others code themselves automatically.

To use, the patient places the end of the lancet device against the side of the fingertip, and presses the button to activate the device. The drop of blood is then applied to the test strip, and the meter displays the result.

Coagulation meters

Similar in concept to blood glucose meters, these meters measure anticoagulant levels in blood, to ensure patients are taking the right amount of blood thinner medications, or

anticoagulants. Blood thinners prevent blood clots that can cause heart attacks or strokes. Users place a drop of their blood from the finger onto a test strip, and insert the strip into the meter. The meter provides an INR number that indicates how quickly blood is clotting.

Blood pressure monitors

These devices measure blood pressure in hypertensive patients. Blood pressure cuffs come in different sizes, so the patient’s arm circumference must be measured to ensure the right fit. Monitors are either manual or automatic. To use a manual device, the patient must squeeze a bulb to pump up the pressure.



Epinephrine auto-injector

Designed for the emergency treatment of severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis), this

pen-like device injects epinephrine, a hormone produced by the adrenal glands. The user delivers the auto-injector dose directly into the muscle of the outer thigh.

Nitroglycerin spray pump

Nitroglycerin is used to relieve angina (chest pain, discomfort, pressure or burning) by relaxing the blood vessels to let more blood and oxygen reach the heart. At the first sign of an angina attack, the patient manually sprays one metered dose of the medication onto or under the tongue.

This is only a brief roundup of devices available for patients. Technicians should refer to their pharmacists for more information.



A special thanks to Jim Snowdon, owner of Snowdon Pharmacy, Toronto, Ont., for his input in the preparation of this article.

Sources: Asthma Society of Canada, Canadian Diabetes Association, Anaphylaxis Canada, Hypertension Canada, Alberta Health Services.

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