

TECHtalk

SEPTEMBER 2015

BY THE NUMBERS

SUPPORT ROLES FOR HOSPITAL PHARMACY TECHNICIANS IN CLINICAL PHARMACY SERVICES

77% (Quebec: 90%*) of hospital pharmacy technicians perform tasks that directly support pharmacists in carrying out their clinical duties:

- **82%** (Atlantic Canada: 100%*) serve as the initial pharmacy liaison for solving drug distribution problems.
- **70%** (Atlantic Canada: 92%*) collect and collate information concerning the patient's pre-admission drug therapy.
- **20%** (Quebec: 32%*) create initial inpatient drug therapy documentation and drug therapy plans at discharge.
- **20%** (BC: 40%*) collect laboratory test results to support drug therapy evaluation and monitoring.
- **19%** (Atlantic Canada: 31%*) assemble pamphlets and documentation to be given to the patient.
- **7%** (BC: 27%*) calculate changes to parenteral nutrition therapy.
- **12%** (Atlantic Canada: 15%*) collate information used in the preparation of drug formulary submissions.
- **27%** (Ontario: 49%*) assist in the collection of data for presentation to the Medication Safety Committee.
- **28%** (Atlantic Canada: 54%*) collect data for drug utilization review to support the drug use evaluation program.
- **17%** (BC, Prairies: 27%*), other.

Source: 2013/2014 Hospital Pharmacy in Canada Report (released June 2015).
 Base: Facilities where pharmacy technicians perform tasks that directly support pharmacists in carrying out their clinical activities.
 *The province/region with the highest percentage for each item.

ACCREDITED CE LESSON INCLUDED:

Cancer drugs: the role of the pharmacy technician

Accredited by the Canadian Council on Continuing Education in Pharmacy



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TRAINING TECHS IN AFGHANISTAN: MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

FOR CANADIAN FORCES CAPTAIN

Cecilia Reyes, deployment to Afghanistan to develop a program for pharmacy technicians was an opportunity she could not pass up—despite receiving only one day's notice due to a last-minute cancellation.

As the Canadian Forces mission evolved from combat to mentoring, Reyes' assignment in Kabul was to advise the pharmacy technician program's lead coordinator, a pharmacist in the Afghan National Army. There were 22 students—including two women—in the program, ranging in age from 20 to 25, all members of the Afghan National Army. "Having the females mix with the male students was very positive, considering the cultural barriers in Afghanistan," says Reyes. They all had taken an entrance exam to join the military, and another to be considered for the "medical trade."

Reyes, a pharmacist in her native country of the Philippines, had also worked as a pharmacy technician, first in Singapore while awaiting her immigration papers to Canada. There, she explains, technicians also dispense and counsel on all but a few types of drugs. When Reyes arrived in Toronto in 2001, she eventually got a job as a pharmacy assistant while studying for her Canadian pharmacist licence. "It's the whole immigrant story," she laughs. She became licensed in December 2003, and joined the military in 2007 as the pharmacy lead at CFB Borden. She later transferred to the Canadian Forces Health Services Group Headquarters in Ottawa until deploying to Kabul in January 2013 for six months.

Having worked as both a pharmacy assistant and a pharmacist was advantageous to the mission. "I could see both sides," she says. "I was able to understand what the tech job entailed. And of course, I already had several years' experience as a pharmacist. So it was like merging all the knowledge and experience I had gained on both sides to help figure out what they really needed to establish this program."

Although the school had already begun teaching the students when she arrived, it



was using an outdated curriculum from the 1980s. "With the experience I had, I was able to bridge the gap and build [the technicians'] job description to reflect the current trends in pharmacy practice and the qualification standards of how a technician should work in a hospital or community pharmacy setting," says Reyes. She also developed a train-the-trainer program for a computerized inventory system, and established a hospital rotation that allowed the students to spend time in the outpatient department, the dispensary, accounting, the medical logistics warehouse, and on the ward.

Although Reyes faced several hurdles along the way, perhaps the greatest was the language barrier—the technical terminology in particular posed a challenge to the ever-present interpreters. But the obstacles paled in comparison to the rewards: the enthusiasm of the students, and the satisfaction of being able to provide them with the tools and training they needed to work as pharmacy technicians. The students graduated about a month after Reyes had completed her mission, heading out to all the battalions in the Afghan National Army, where they were in great demand due to a shortage of pharmacists.

Reyes now works as a pharmacy officer in the Central Medical Equipment Depot at Garrison Petawawa, where she supervises

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CAMH offers opioid treatment course for techs and assistants

THE CENTRE FOR ADDICTION AND Mental Health (CAMH) is offering a self-paced online course on opioid dependence treatment that has been specifically designed for pharmacy assistants and technicians.

The course provides key information on the complexity of opioid dependence, the inter-professional collaboration required, the regulations and policies in Ontario that govern how healthcare providers are to provide treatment and recommendations for effective communication with pharmacists.

Learners have one month to complete the five-module course, which costs \$325. It

has been approved for Canadian Council on Continuing Education in Pharmacy (CCCEP) accreditation for 14 credits. Registration is open from October 19 to November 30; accreditation expiry date is April 16, 2016. No prerequisites are needed to take the course.

Pharmacy technicians and assistants play an essential role on the healthcare team providing services to clients who are dependent on opioids, says CAMH. Knowledge about opioid dependence and best practices for treatment are critical for serving clients in the best way possible.

To register, visit <https://app.certain.com/profile/form/index.cfm?PKformID=0x210024282d8>.

PEI allows pharmacy assistants to perform additional duties

ACCORDING TO THE PEI COLLEGE OF Pharmacists, amendments have been made to the Pharmacy Act that will allow pharmacy assistants, in a retail setting, to perform certain activities under the direct supervision of a pharmacist who is physically present in the pharmacy.

These activities include:

- collecting information from a patient for a patient profile
- recording and retrieving data about a patient or a prescription
- entering prescription information into a database
- non-sterile compounding, if a member has approved the formulation and process
- selecting an appropriate container for a drug
- preparing and packaging a drug for dispensing
- attaching the prescription label and any

- other labels to a container
- replenishing drug storage containers and dispensing machines
- managing drug inventory
- implementing quality assurance and risk management policies.

Pharmacy assistants in any crown corporation, such as a hospital or provincial pharmacy, are permitted to participate in reserved activities, through the Exemption Regulations, until December 31, 2018 (the deadline for registration for those who do not graduate from a CCAPP-accredited pharmacy technician program), after which time they must be a member of the PEI College of Pharmacists.

The College had registered six technicians as of July.

Free CEUs available for BC techs

THE COLLEGE OF PHARMACISTS OF British Columbia is urging pharmacy technicians in that province to take advantage of the 13 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) per year that they can access free of charge.

In August 2014, the College partnered with the Canadian Pharmacists Association to provide free universal access to e-Therapeutics+ Complete for every registered pharmacy technician and pharmacist in the province.

The online resource, updated biweekly, pro-

vides technicians with evidence-based, reliable Canadian drug and therapeutic information.

When they sign up for e-Therapeutics+ Complete, technicians will also receive "e-Therapeutics Highlights CE," a weekly e-mail that will allow them to stay current with the latest in Canadian drug and therapeutic information, all while earning CEUs.

The College recently noted that fewer than 50% of pharmacy professionals had e-Therapeutics+ Complete.

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the coordination of medical supplies to deployed operations.

Currently, the Canadian Forces has no classification for pharmacy technicians, but is working toward regulation. "I think this

will be a good thing, because it will enable pharmacists to focus more on providing patient-focused care," says Reyes. "And with the expanded scope of practice rolling out across provinces and jurisdictions, we need more time to spend with our patients."

Helping seniors deal with depression

WHILE FEELING SAD OR LONELY CAN BE a normal part of aging, one in five seniors actually suffers symptoms of depression. Depression is a serious medical issue. Untreated, it can become a risk factor for suicide.

The pharmacy team has an important role to play in helping these patients.

First, because they are often the patient's first point of contact, if they see that a patient is exhibiting symptoms of depression (see below), they should refer him or her to the pharmacist for counselling, says Philippe Vincent, clinical pharmacist at the Institut universitaire en santé mentale de Montréal, and assistant professor at the Faculty of Pharmacy of the Université de Montréal. The pharmacist can help ensure that the patient's medication is working well, explain its mechanism of action, and discuss any side effects; if the patient's medical condition is causing his or her depression, effective treatment of the condition is key.

If pharmacist suspects that that the patient might need further counselling for depression, he or she can collaborate with the patient's doctor in case a referral to a mental health expert is required.

Vincent also advises technicians and assistants to ask patients or their caregivers about their antidepressant or sleeping pill prescription renewals. "Never let patients leave without asking how the medication is working," says Vincent. "Ask about all of their medications. Ask how a patient is feeling." Vincent believes these routine questions are one of the simplest ways to assess how a patient is doing overall, and can easily be done by the pharmacy assistant or technician who is passing the drug to the patient.

He points out that patients in assisted-living facilities are particularly vulnerable; because they usually have their drugs delivered, they may not have the opportunity to consult with the pharma-

cist or have any one-on-one front-line care with a healthcare provider.

Technicians can also refer patients and caregivers to various resources that are available to help seniors suffering from depression (see sidebar), Vincent suggests, "if the technician knows the resources and is at ease with giving out this information."

Shoppers Drug Mart recently teamed up with the Government of Canada and the Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health (CCSMH) to develop mental health resources for seniors dealing with depression and thoughts of suicide, and their caregivers. The partnership gives pharmacists access to new continuing education tools, as well as two new

brochures to help older adults identify symptoms and access treatment.

Treatment for these patients can range from psychotherapy and support groups to antidepressant medications and sleeping pills for those who suffer from insomnia.

RESOURCES FOR PATIENTS AND CAREGIVERS

- Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health – www.ccsmh.ca
- Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention – www.suicideprevention.ca
- Canadian Caregiver Coalition – www.ccc-ccan.ca
- Canadian Mental Health Association – www.cmha.ca
- Local crisis lines (listed in the front page of the phone book or on the Internet)

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

- Feeling sad, lonely or anxious
- Feeling guilty or having regrets
- Loss of pleasure from favourite things
- Sleeping problems (too much or not enough)
- Problems thinking and focusing
- Less energy/feeling tired or slow
- Feeling unwell/more aches and pains/irritated
- Changes in eating habits or weight
- Thinking about suicide or death

Source: Shoppers Drug Mart, "Depression in Older Adults – You Are Not Alone!" (<http://www1.shoppersdrugmart.ca/en/health-and-pharmacy/health/depression-in-older-adults-you-are-not-alone/63892/3>).



ARE PHYSICIANS AND PATIENTS ASKING ABOUT GENERIC DRUGS?

We've introduced a new, informative website to answer their questions about safety and efficacy. Visit **TevaMakesMedicines.ca**.

How can you improve your pharmacy's injection services?

As a technician, you are one of your pharmacy's most valuable resources—now, you can even get involved in its immunization program.

Teva Canada's half-day workshop "*The Role of the Pharmacy Technician in the Team Approach to Immunization/Injection*,"* accredited for 3.0 CEUs, will teach you how you can help your pharmacy's immunization program be more efficient and more effective, from identifying patients who would benefit from injection services to dispelling myths around immunizations.

For more information and a list of upcoming workshops in your area, visit [TevaPharmacySolutions.com/TechImmunization](https://www.TevaPharmacySolutions.com/TechImmunization).

*Currently available in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario.