

TECH talk

NOVEMBER 2010

N.S. MOVES CLOSER TO REGULATION

The province of Nova Scotia has taken another step towards the regulation of pharmacy technicians. The proposal that the Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists (NSCP) sent to the Health Professions Regulatory Review Committee in April has received a positive response from Committee members. Their recommendation has been forwarded to the Minister and Deputy Minister of Health, says Sue Sampson, project director, NSCP. "We are awaiting word on whether the Minister/Deputy Minister will agree with the Committee's recommendation and move this forward," she notes. "The agenda for the spring 2011 sitting of the Legislature should be decided in the next couple of months, and we are hoping that our new Pharmacy Act will get the nod to be brought before the House in the spring. We are currently redrafting our Pharmacy Act and associated regulations in anticipation of a spring hearing."

Meanwhile, pharmacists in the province are eagerly awaiting the passage of proposed changes to the Pharmacy Act that will allow them to administer drugs and to order, receive, conduct and interpret tests. That is expected to take place during the fall sitting of the Legislature. The amendments had passed second reading before the House adjourned for the summer. In the interim, the NSCP has been working to create the associated regulations and standards of Practice, says Registrar Susan Wedlake.

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A WINNING FORMULA

Tech finds fulfillment in compounding—earns award on the way

WHEN TECHNICIAN SARAH-LYNN DUNLOP

joined Stuart Ellis IDA Pharmacy in Collingwood, Ont., she found her calling in the dispensary's compounding lab.

Her dedication also earned her the winning entry in the Pharmacy Technician Initiatives category of the 2010 Commitment to Care & Service awards, hosted by *Pharmacy Practice* and *Drugstore Canada*.

Soon after joining the community pharmacy nearly six years ago, Dunlop earned a promotion to head technician. "But it wasn't long before I realized that Sarah-Lynn needed more to occupy her time and utilize the knowledge that she possessed," says Lesley Paul, owner/pharmacist. "I sent her off to PCCA [Professional Compounding Centres of America] in London for primary training in compounding, and I don't think she has ever looked back. She had found her passion."

Dunlop, who has a B.A. in psychology from the University of Western Ontario, started working as a tech part-time while she was in university. "I knew I wanted to do something in health sciences, so I thought I would explore pharmacy," she says. She continued to work as a technician while her husband was completing his teaching degree, but intended to pursue a degree in pharmacy at the time she joined Stuart Ellis IDA.

She changed her mind, however, with her newfound enthusiasm for compounding. "Lesley really had a lot of faith in my abilities and education," explains Dunlop, "and she let me take on a lot of responsibility in the lab. I found that I could both use my education and really help patients as a technician." She is currently completing her last bridging program to become a registered pharmacy technician. "I am really looking forward to the new responsibilities that come with this expanded role," she notes.

Already, Dunlop has created a Standard



2010 Commitment to Care & Service Winner Sarah-Lynn Dunlop

Operating Procedures manual to improve workflow; developed a training manual for new technicians; implemented an inventory-control system for chemical usage in the lab; started a Complaints and Mishaps log book to document any problem a patient has had with a compound, and how it was resolved; and created charts that track when patients are due for refills. She also takes the initiative to research ways to help patients, frequently consulting with the staff and pharmacists at PCCA, says Paul.

But it is the compassion towards her patients that really distinguishes Dunlop. "Sarah-Lynn always puts the patients first," says Paul. "She treats every one of them with the dignity and respect that they deserve. She strives to find a solution to their problems. Every one of her patients leaves satisfied with her service and solutions."

Dunlop advises techs who are interested in compounding too, like a famous advertising slogan, "just do it." She suggests they start by finding a pharmacy that is a member of PCCA, or taking the initiative to "call PCCA yourself and see if there are any courses you can take on your own." But whether it is compounding or any other aspect of their jobs, she encourages all technicians to "find something in pharmacy that you are really passionate about and learn as much as you can about it. Bring ideas to your pharmacists." After all, she adds, "technicians have a lot to offer. Sometimes, it is hard to be 'heard,' so as technicians, we need to create our own opportunities."

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ONTARIO NEWS

Regulated techs need liability insurance

AS OF DECEMBER 15, registered pharmacy students and pharmacy technicians in Ontario will be required to carry personal professional liability insurance. The policy must be issued in the name of the individual member, and provide coverage wherever in the province he or she practises.

At a September meeting, the Ontario College of Pharmacists Council approved for circulation an amendment to its bylaws to reflect this requirement. Council will consider the feedback at its December meeting and

once approved, the amendment will be effective immediately.

The Canadian Association of Pharmacy Technicians (CAPT) recently launched an Association-sponsored professional liability program in partnership with McCaslin Horne Insurance Brokers and Grain Insurance & Guarantee Company. The annual premium is \$125 plus 8% retail sales tax. CAPT members can download an application at www.capt.ca or www.mccaslinhorne.com and send it directly to the Association.

ALBERTA NEWS

ACP to elect pharmacy technicians to its Council

THE ALBERTA COLLEGE OF PHARMACISTS (ACP) is currently amending its bylaws to include elected regulated pharmacy technicians (PhTs) on its Council. It is proposing that two of the nine elected pharmacist positions be replaced by pharmacy technicians. As regulated health professionals, the elected technicians will be entitled to voting privileges.

Since 2008, technicians Robin Burns and Teresa Hennessey have acted as observers on the Council and have participated in

all discussions, particularly those related to regulation, says Karen Mills, communications leader, ACP.

The ACP has completed a 60-day consultation on proposed reforms to the make up and election of the Council. As of press time, the College was reviewing the feedback from the consultation. It will then amend the bylaws and circulate them for further consultation. "Our goal is to hold elections for PhTs to the Council in the spring of 2011," says Mills.

QUEBEC NEWS

Update on new tech delegation standards in Quebec

IN SEPTEMBER, the Ordre des pharmaciens du Québec (OPQ) unveiled a draft standard of practice that will govern the delegation of technical functions to pharmacy technicians. This standard will apply in both community and institutional settings.

This update to the November 2005 standard aims to reduce the number of technical tasks under the sole responsibility of pharmacists. The belief is that pharmacist will then be able to devote more time to dispensing pharmaceutical care and services to their patients, therefore putting their expertise to more productive use.

Only technical tasks that require no "professional judgment" will be appropriate for delegation to technicians. Pharmacists will be free to delegate the technical tasks they see fit, in accordance with the needs of their pharmacy.

Pharmacists and institutions will remain professionally liable for acts delegated to technicians. In the event of a civil suit as the result of an error made by a tech, the community pharmacist or healthcare institution must cover the claim.

Every technical task delegated to a tech

must be described and the conditions of delegation entered in a "policy and procedures" document. Technicians to whom the pharmacy delegates a technical task will be known as "delegates" and must receive training, show evidence of their competencies in both written and practical evaluations, and detail their ability to uphold policies and procedures. Quality checks will be carried out to verify the safety of the delegation process.

In September, the OPQ also published a draft of a specific standard of practice governing the delegation of container content verification, based on the principles listed above.

This draft standard also contains a list of activities appropriate for delegation to techs, including the filling of pill counters or other automatic devices, the distribution of drugs in pill bottles or blister packs, and the reconstitution or dilution of sterile or non-sterile drugs. There will be two types of technicians: the preparer and the delegatee. The delegatee will check the preparer's work.

The board of directors of the OPQ plans to adopt these two new standards by late fall of this year.

Helping patients prevent cold and flu

ACHOO! IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR

again—for sniffles and sneezes, coughs and chills. In other words, it's cold and flu season, which in Canada usually runs from November to April.

To help Canadians get better prepared, they should know the difference between cold and seasonal flu. While both illnesses are caused by viruses, a cold tends to develop gradually, usually over the course of a day or two. It can lead to tiredness, sneezing and a runny nose, but it usually does not cause fever. A cold can last anywhere from a few days to two weeks. The flu, on the other hand, hits suddenly and hard. It can cause weakness, tiredness and fever as high as 40°C. Common symptoms include aches and pains in muscles and joints, chills, a severe headache and sore throat. A fever due to the seasonal flu may last a few days, but weakness and tiredness could persist for several weeks.

Up to a quarter of Canadians develop seasonal flu each year. And although many of them are concerned about catching a cold or flu this year, 40% are not making an effort to plan ahead, according to a recent Angus Reid consumer survey conducted for Shoppers Drug Mart (SDM).

That's where pharmacy technicians can help. "Pharmacy technicians have an important role to play in helping patients prevent these illnesses," says Akeel Jaffer, a SDM pharmacist in Toronto. For example, teaching them proper hand-washing techniques. When done correctly, hand-washing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Flu viruses can live on your hands for up to five minutes, and they can live on hard surfaces that you touch with your hands (like countertops and telephones) for up to two days. When washing with soap and water is not possible, patients should keep an alcohol-based hand sanitizer handy.

Technicians should also advise patients to avoid touching their mouth or nose; to cough or sneeze into their sleeve or a tissue; to stay home when they are ill; and to get a flu shot. Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent influenza. The best time to be vaccinated is early in the flu season, between October and December, before the number of influenza cases increases in Canada. Full protection takes about two weeks from the time you get the flu shot, and lasts for about six months. Jaffer suggests that technicians be able to provide patients with information on local flu-shot clinics.

Technicians can also advise their patients to check the expiry dates of their medica-

tions before taking them, he adds. Cold and flu products are some of the most frequently cited expired products found in medicine cabinets in Canadian households, notes the SDM survey. Expired medications should be returned to the pharmacy for safe disposal.

For more information on cold and flu, Jaffer recommends that technicians visit www.fightflu.ca, a website developed by the government of Canada in collaboration with provincial governments. It provides basic facts about the flu and methods of prevention, including the steps for good hand-washing techniques.

As Benjamin Franklin wisely said: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.



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