

TECHtalk

MAY 2018

BY THE NUMBERS PHARMACY TECHNICIANS IN CANADA

Total licensed pharmacy technicians: **8,185**

Provincial and Territorial Statistics

Jurisdiction	Total licensed pharmacy technicians
Alberta	1,456
British Columbia	1,492
Manitoba	0*
New Brunswick	81
Newfoundland and Labrador	139
Northwest Territories	0
Nova Scotia	198
Nunavut	0
Ontario	4,597
Prince Edward Island	27
Quebec	0
Saskatchewan	195
Yukon	0
Canadian Forces	0
CANADA	8,185

*Pharmacy technicians are not regulated in all Canadian jurisdictions at this time. This data reflects the number of pharmacy technicians who are licensed and regulated by a pharmacy regulatory authority. Pharmacy technicians in Manitoba are regulated by the College of Pharmacists of Manitoba; however, they are listed as a regulated pharmacy technician but not licensed, or included in this list.

Source: NAPRA (as of January 1, 2018)

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WINNING WAYS

“I WAS SHOCKED,” SAYS PHARMACY

technician Peggy Pischke, describing her reaction to being selected as the recipient of the 2017 Professionalism Award from the Pharmacy Technician Society of Alberta (PTSA). “I don’t seek out that attention; I just do what I think is right,” she says modestly. In fact, Pischke has always viewed her long history of volunteering as an opportunity to grow professionally and “to collaborate with other regulated bodies, mentor fellow techs and make lifelong friendships.”

A founding member of PTSA, Pischke has served on the board in several executive positions and, prior to that, on the board of what was then the Alberta chapter of the Canadian Association of Pharmacy Technicians (CAPT-AB).

Since graduating as a pharmacy assistant from Alberta’s Red Deer College in 1994—becoming regulated in 2015 and now filling a unique role as a member of the pharmacy informatics team for Alberta Healthcare Services (AHS) in Edmonton—Pischke has earned the respect and admiration of colleagues and stakeholders for her dedication to the profession.

“Peggy is clearly an outstanding professional, leader and colleague,” says technician Ryan Mapa, coordinator, distribution optimization operational excellence, provincial operations, pharmacy services, who was one of the nominators. “In working with Peggy on the PTSA board, as well as on major projects in AHS, I have witnessed her ability to accommodate and adapt to the changing environment while being able to effect change to support the pharmacy technician profession and ultimately improve patient care.”

As a member of the Pharmacy Informatics Department (PHIs), Pischke provides support to the AHS sites within the Edmonton zone for their pharmacy software. In this capacity, she is responsible for setting up and testing system upgrades, creating new inventory items, purchasing records and orders sets, and maintaining information when changes occur. “It’s a pretty specialized role,” she



explains. “The pharmacy informaticist focuses on application of technology for pharmacists in supporting, streamlining, improving workflow and increasing patient safety with best practices and reliable systems. It supports the business side—the actual pharmacy services and pharmacy dispensing system.”

Although Pischke did not have any specialized training in informatics when she applied for the position, she says the opportunity to participate in all areas of drug distribution and purchasing in her previous position as a technician at Westview Health Centre helped her land her current job. “I had a good understanding of the pharmacy dispensing system, and that was one of the qualifications to apply for the job in informatics,” she says. “And then everything else was really on-the-job training.”

What she finds most rewarding about the position is the challenge of troubleshooting and resolving issues, completing projects, and providing excellent customer service to the many stakeholders with whom she collaborates.

But change is in the offing for Pischke. AHS is in the process of launching Connect Care, which will create a common clinical information system from more than 1,300 independent systems. That means that Pischke’s job, as it exists currently, will end. The informatics team in Edmonton has been whittled down from four to two members, with Pischke and a co-worker responsible for maintaining the current system until Connect Care is implemented. “Then I’ll move on to something different,” she says.

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Tech Talk is endorsed by:



An educational service for Canadian pharmacy technicians,
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Interactive learning tool helps techs strengthen knowledge

THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO SCHOOL of Pharmacy has launched Pharmacy5in5, an interactive learning platform designed to help pharmacy technicians and pharmacists strengthen their knowledge in a variety of practice areas.

The platform lets practitioners test their knowledge on a specific topic by taking a short quiz and answering five questions in five minutes. At the end of each quiz, pharmacy professionals can view their score and see which questions they answered incorrectly. They can then improve their knowledge by reviewing a number of resources—including cases, videos, infographics, websites and more—on the topic in which they were assessed. The platform also adds up practitioners' scores based on all the quizzes they have completed, and shows them how they performed in comparison to

other pharmacy professionals who have taken the quizzes. Topics will be updated and expanded over time.

"Pharmacy professionals need to stay abreast of current and emerging issues in practice, and Pharmacy5in5 helps practitioners stay up to date with these issues," says Susan James, director of quality at the Ontario College of Pharmacists (OCP). "The College encourages all practitioners to use the platform on an ongoing basis for this reason."

OCP supported the University of Waterloo in the development of the platform, and will have access to aggregate data from it to better understand pharmacy professionals' progress in optimizing their scope of practice and providing safe, high-quality pharmacy care.

Ontario practitioners can log into the website at www.pharmacy5in5.ca to get started.

NAPRA adds Guidance document to latest Standards

AFTER RECEIVING SOME 800 COMMENTS from pharmacy technicians, pharmacists and pharmacy organizations, the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA) is taking a new approach in the release of the Model Standards for Pharmacy Compounding of Non-Sterile Preparations.

The Ontario College of Pharmacists (OCP) reports that the Standards will now be accompanied by a Guidance document that will provide technicians and pharmacists who compound non-sterile preparations with the details necessary to evaluate their practice, develop service-related procedures and implement appropriate quality controls for both patients and compounding personnel. NAPRA is expected to publish the Standards and the Guidance document this year.

This will be the third and final instalment

of the Model Standards documents for pharmacy compounding; the first two, related to sterile preparations, have been released. Implementation of the Standards is under the authority of the respective provincial, territorial or Canadian Forces pharmacy regulatory bodies, each of which establishes their own process and timeline.

For its part, OCP approved the adoption of the latest Standards at its December 2017 meeting, and is now working towards establishing an implementation date and developing a communication and education plan for members. Most recently, Council approved the implementation by January 2019 of the Model Standards for Pharmacy Compounding of Non-Hazardous Sterile Preparations, and Model Standards for Pharmacy Compounding of Hazardous Sterile Preparations.

B.C. College of Pharmacists uses new focus areas for tech PRP

AS OF DECEMBER 2017, COMPLIANCE officers at the College of Pharmacists of British Columbia began conducting Pharmacy Professionals Reviews for Pharmacy Technicians in Community Practice using a new set of focus areas that are more applicable to techs' scope of practice.

The focus areas for the Practice Review Program (PRP) are now:

- Patient identification verification
- Product distribution (new)
- Collaboration (new)
- Documentation

Under the direction of the Practice Review Committee, the College used input from pharmacy professionals and the College's committees, along with a review of the College's bylaws and policies, to assess which additional areas within a pharmacy technician's scope of practice had the most impact on patient safety. Each focus area is designed to be relevant for pharmacy technicians practising in community or hospital settings.

For more information about the Practice Review Program, visit www.bcpharmacists.org/prp.

Veterinary compounding: an easier pill to swallow

ANYONE WHO HAS EVER TRIED TO GET a cat to swallow a pill can appreciate the important role that pharmacies—and trained pharmacy technicians—play in compounding medications for animals. Although animals often have variations of the same diseases humans can have—including skin rashes, eye and ear infections, heart conditions, cancer, and diabetes—medicating pets presents unique problems that compounding often can solve.

“Most commercially available products are not suitable for animals, and alterations need to be made to ensure that they, too, are getting the proper doses,” says Shana Briggs, a pharmacy technician at Strathcona Pharmacy in Edmonton who has given presentations on compounding for veterinary use. Dosages can be very tricky with dogs, for example; a dose of medication that works for an 80-pound Golden Retriever may be far too much for a six-pound Yorkie to handle. Large and exotic pets also pose many medication challenges.

Pharmacies compound for all kinds of animals, from zoo animals, to farm animals, to pets as small as hamsters. Briggs refers to this customization as “extemporaneous compounding,” defined as “the preparation, mixing, assembling and packaging of a medicinal product based on a prescription for an individual or, in this case, a specific animal.”

Veterinarians rely on extemporaneous compounding when a medication is not available in Canada or has been discontinued. “Just because a commercially available drug has been discontinued doesn’t mean a powder form is unavailable,” says Briggs. Often, a medication is discontinued because it is not needed in the vast quantities necessary to make mass production cost-effective. But when that medication has worked well for certain animals, a compounding technician or pharmacist can provide the required therapy in the strength and dosage form to meet their specific needs.

In other cases, a medication may be compounded to make it more palatable to an animal—such as the preparation of a treat base along with the active ingredient; or powders for larger animals, such as horses, mixed with things like icing sugar. The pet who refuses to take medication because of the taste is a prime opportunity for compounding, says the Professional Compounding Centers of America (PCCA). Cats, for example, like tuna. Dogs don’t appreciate a traditional solution of medication being squirted into their mouth, but they’ll take it gladly when it’s flavoured with meat or part of a tasty biscuit or treat. Birds cannot take large volumes of liquid medication, but they will accept a small dose of a tasty, fruit-flavored, concentrated solution.

Other possibilities include transdermal creams, ointments and gels that deliver the drug through the skin and into the underlying tissue, joint or bloodstream. An example is administering drugs to cats through the skin in the inner ear.

Just like humans, animals may have allergies or intolerances to ingredients in commercially available products, notes Briggs. In that case, pharmacies can compound medications that are free of lactose, gluten, starch or gelatin. “For example, most capsules are gelatin, but special cellulose or even vegetarian capsules are available,” she says. And if no other forms work, even suppositories or

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EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR TECHS

The Professional Compounding Centers of America (PCCA) sponsors a wide range of in-person and web-based training and educational options for pharmacy technicians, including courses in Canada. Its hands-on Comprehensive Compounding Course (C3) covers compounding techniques, equipment and use, dosage forms, quality and safety procedures, legal issues and marketing techniques. PCCA also sponsors accredited continuing education programs in a range of topics, including veterinary compounding. Visit <http://www.pccarx.com/pcca-services/pcca-education>.



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PTSBC conducts national survey on tech scope of practice

THE PHARMACY TECHNICIAN SOCIETY of British Columbia has conducted a national survey of pharmacy technicians. “The purpose of the survey is to gather a snapshot in a time of pharmacy technician scope of practice across Canada,” says Bal Dhillon,

PTSBC director. “Data will be used in aggregate format to understand the national status of pharmacy technician scope of practice.”

The survey closed in February, and results will be posted at www.ptsbc.org when available.

Something for everyone at CAPT PDC

AGAINST THE STUNNING BACKDROP of Whistler, B.C., attendees at the 2018 Professional Development Conference (PDC), sponsored by the Canadian Association of Pharmacy Technicians (CAPT), enjoyed two full days of educational sessions, along with plenty of opportunities for socializing and networking. The 86 delegates hailed from all provinces, with one even travelling from the U.K.

The event’s opening session, in which Dr. Patricia Gerber of the University of British Columbia’s Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences discussed professionalism and ethics, received great feedback, says CAPT board member Rahila Ovais. A session on opioid crisis management by Pier Health Resource Centre team in Vancouver, which was collaboratively presented by a pharmacy technician, a pharmacist and a nurse, was also well received, as was a presentation by Jason Min, also of UBC, entitled “Making a Pledge for Cultural Humility in Indigenous Health.” Two pharmacy technician students

also presented CE sessions on malaria prevention and superbugs.

Other topics included insulin pump infusion sets, inhaler techniques, inter-professional collaboration between pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, and the fundamentals of pharmacy compounding.

Alyssa Stanlake from Pier Health Resource Centre was the recipient of the CAPT pharmacy technician/assistant excellence award of the year. Stanlake is a pharmacy technician who began working with Pier in 2016 and became the operational lead shortly thereafter. She is responsible for designing the daily workflow that fills nearly 1,000 prescriptions 365 days a year, while supporting two other pharmacies in a central fill capacity. She is actively involved in the hiring and training process of the entire staff, as well as the acquisition and implementation of technology, from computer software to multiple packaging machines.

Next year’s PDC will head east to St. Andrews, N.B., May 3-5.

>> “WINNING WAYS” CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Typical of her ability to adapt, Pischke views the imminent change as an “opportunity to search for a new, unique role.”

Whatever that might be, it is sure to be one in which Pischke will continue to support and promote the profession while working to improve patient care. “Peggy has greatly impacted the pharmacy technician profession in Alberta for years,” says Jennifer Bean, project pharmacy technician at Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton, who has also worked with Pischke on the PTSA board and nominated her for the Award. “She continues to be a great example and ambassador for technicians with Alberta Health Services and this province.”

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enemas can be prepared.

The National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA) has established three model standards for pharmacy compounding: for non-hazardous sterile preparations, hazardous sterile preparations, and non-sterile preparations. The first two standards, related to sterile preparations, have been released, with the third one coming soon, says NAPRA. For more information, visit www.napra.ca.

Notes