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INSTRUCTIONS

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Managing the dispensary and optimizing medication management support services: the role of the pharmacy technician

by John Papastergiou, BScPhm

Learning objectives

Upon successful completion of this lesson, the pharmacy technician will be able to do the following:

1. List the differences in responsibility and scope of practice between pharmacy technicians and pharmacists.
2. Describe ways in which pharmacy technicians can manage dispensary functions and improve workflow.
3. Explore methods that pharmacy technicians can use to support the delivery of professional pharmacy services.
4. Integrate strategies for pharmacy technicians to improve medication management and adherence.

An educational service for Canadian pharmacy technicians, brought to you by Teva.

Over the last few years, we have observed a dramatic evolution in the profession of pharmacist. The scope of practice has expanded to help meet the changing healthcare needs of the Canadian public and to reduce the pressures placed on the healthcare system. Traditionally, the pharmacist's role has centred on dispensary management and the procurement and safe distribution of medication. In recent years, pharmacists have seen their role expand to include a portfolio of clinical service offerings such as medication reviews, prescription renewals, clinical adaptations and vaccinations.[1] As a result, pharmacists have found themselves challenged with time, workflow and staffing issues, and the ability to offer consistent, sustainable services to their patients. These challenges are the direct result of attempting to balance conventional pharmacy dispensing services with the consistent provision of clinical programs.

As the role of the pharmacist has evolved, so has that of the technician. As of December 2010, pharmacy technicians are regulated health professionals, with clearly defined standards of practice.[2] Many pharmacies have yet to capitalize on this expanded role. Integrating a technician into practice offers a viable solution to the workflow issues faced by many pharmacies, particularly when maximizing the pharmacist's and technician's scope. In order to do this, however, we must clearly understand what a technician is permitted to do under their own authority as a regulated healthcare professional. In general terms, the division of responsibilities can be defined as:

TECHNICIANS are accountable and responsible for the technical aspects of both new and refill prescriptions (i.e., the correct patient, signature, drug, dosage form/route, dose, doctor).

PHARMACISTS remain accountable and responsible for the therapeutic/clinical appropriateness of all new and refill prescriptions and all therapeutic consultation.

Currently, nine provinces in Canada have regulated pharmacy technicians: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island (PEI) and Newfoundland.[13]

Although the scope of practice may vary slightly due to local legislation, the core roles of the pharmacy technician are similar across the provinces.

The table below shows examples of the scope of practice of regulated pharmacy technicians:[2,14-20]

While the objective of technician integration is to optimize the roles of the technician and pharmacist, workflow will depend on a number of individual variables including prescription volume, OTC traffic, physical layout, staff experience and patient demographics. There is no "cookie-cutter" approach to maximize dispensary workflow and productivity. It may be necessary to experiment in order to balance all these variables. By optimizing the integration of regulated pharmacy technicians, the efficiency of the dispensing function can be improved and the focus of the pharmacist can shift to offering professional services.

TABLE 1 - Scope of practice of regulated pharmacy technicians nationally									
	BC	AB	SK	ON	NB	MB	NF	NS	PEI
Ensure the accuracy of drug and personal health information	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Receive and transcribe verbal prescriptions from practitioners	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y*
Transfer prescriptions to and receive prescriptions from other pharmacies	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y	Y*	Y*	Y*	Y*
Ensure accuracy of drug preparation	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Perform final check of drug preparation**	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Answer questions from patients that require therapeutic knowledge, clinical analysis, or assessment	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Witness ingestion of methadone	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Determine that it is appropriate to dispense a refill prescription	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Identify and resolve drug-related problems	N	N	N	N	Y"	N	N	N	N
Administer a substance by injection or inhalation for the purpose of demonstration	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Perform a procedure on tissue below the dermis (e.g., using a lancing device) under direct supervision of a pharmacist	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N

*Must comply with the provincial laws &regulations for drug class
**Final check should be performed by a pharmacy technician (or a pharmacist) who did not enter the prescription into the pharmacy software system or who did not select the drug from stock. However, if another member of the team is not available, all technical aspects, including the final check, can be completed by the same technician.
"The New Brunswick legislation states that technicians may be involved in the implementation and monitoring of patient care plans while under the supervision of a pharmacist[21].

In order to transition into a workflow model that enables the provision of sustainable clinical services, it is necessary to explore a number of key concepts:
1) Technicians as champions of the dispensing function.
2) Technicians as drivers of professional programs.
3) The technician's role in supporting medication management and adherence.

Technicians as champions of the dispensing function

In a typical example from a busy community pharmacy, the pharmacist must balance checking prescriptions with ringing phones, physician calls, OTC questions, technician lunch breaks, new walk-in prescriptions, and a whole host of other activities. During busy periods, staff pharmacists will almost always revert back to their traditional dispensing model and abandon any attempt to offer additional clinical programs. This sends a mixed message to patients and will fail to differentiate the pharmacy as a facility that excels in the provision of patient-centred healthcare services. It is understandable that the ability to offer sustainable professional services can be a challenge in this environment.

Optimizing pharmacy technician utilization offers a viable solution to this challenge. Technicians can effectively manage all aspects of the dispensing function and appropriately direct patient queries. For example, in a model with two pharmacy technicians and one pharmacist, technicians can be responsible for prescription data entry, filling, product checking and dispensing refills. The 'tech-check-tech' model has been used successfully for years in the hospital setting. If a pharmacist is busy providing a professional service, there is no longer a bottleneck of prescriptions to be checked. Additionally, with the ability to take verbal orders and transfer prescriptions, technicians can further free up pharmacists to provide professional services and counsel patients. The technician is able to direct the workflow and manage the efficient distribution of prescriptions. The pharmacist is available to focus on patient health concerns. The result is an efficient seamless workflow.[4,5]

Technicians as drivers of professional programs

Moreover, in addition to assuming technical tasks, technicians can play an active, indirect role in the professional programs themselves.[6,7] As the primary point of contact, technicians are well-positioned to identify patients that may benefit from professional pharmacy services. In order to do this, they must be able to[8]:
1) Define the Service
   - What are you offering the patient?
   - Understand basic process to delivering the service
   - Nature of the consultation, duration of appointments, items covered
   - Inherent benefits of the service
   - Personalized approach
   - Maximum results from drug therapies
   - Support through regular follow-up
   - Answers to common questions
2) Screen for patients
3) Notify pharmacists about eligible patients
4) Book appointments and call patients to

TABLE 2 - Common Opportunities to Identify Patients for Medication Reviews

1. Pre-op prescription (bowel prep, eye drops, pre-dental, pre-MRI)
2. Vacation supply orders (they are travelling and should have the medication review document with them at all times)
3. Patient prescription file transfers
4. Annual Official Income Tax Receipt Request
5. Patient Relocating—either to a different city or nursing home
6. Specialist visit or annual physical check-up with a physician
7. Patient confused or uncertain about medication names
8. Hospital discharge or planned admission
9. Significant changes made to an existing medication profile or the addition of new medication
10. Documented evidence of patient non-adherence

remind them about appointments
5) Provide other follow-up support including general documentation.

Prescription drop-off also offers the opportunity for pharmacy technicians to identify patients with newly diagnosed chronic conditions, candidates for immunization and medication review, or opportunities for medical device education. In certain situations, technicians themselves can play an important role in helping patients choose devices such as blood glucose meters and demonstrate their use. Table 2 outlines some common scenarios that provide opportunities for technicians to identify potential candidates for medication reviews.

Technician's role in supporting medication management and adherence

Medication non-adherence is a large obstacle in the appropriate use of medication. Major barriers to adherence include an increasing number of medications, complex regimens, and a lack of patient understanding. Efforts to improve adherence have been aimed at simplifying medication packaging, providing effective medication reminders, and making regimens less complicated. Pharmacy technicians can play an active role in improving medication management and adherence by promoting compliance packaging, offering refill reminder services, and implementing medication synchronization.[9]

Compliance packaging is a simple and effective mechanism to improve patient adherence. Typically, in many pharmacies, medication is dispensed in cards with 28 sealed compartments that organize medication in four doses a day for a full week. With compliance packaging, patients know exactly when to take their medication and

can easily refer to their card if they suspect they may have forgotten to take or skipped a dose. A pharmacist verifies the appropriateness of the medications that are packaged together. The service itself is organized, simple and secure. Technicians can actively identify patients with multiple medications, adherence issues, complex regimens, or cognitive deficits for enrolment into the program.

Technological solutions also impact the way that patients interact with their pharmacies. Technicians are instrumental in the successful implementation and overall awareness of new technology in the pharmacy. For example, e-refills allow patients to have access to emailed refill reminders and then automatically request that their prescriptions be prepared. In addition to the obvious adherence benefits, these solutions

allow for workload to be systematically completed in advance and help relieve workflow congestion at the pharmacy. For patients who do not register for e-refill services, technicians or assistants can proactively contact these patients by telephone when their prescriptions are due. Again, this allows for more streamlined workflow and reduces the stress and anxiety experienced by pharmacy staff as a result of unplanned spikes in prescription volume.

Finally, patient medication profiles are far too commonly scattered and disorganized. Medications are filled on different dispensing dates, for different durations of supply, and with a different number of refills. All of these factors lead to unsynchronized medication profiles creating adherence issues for patients and workflow problems for pharmacies. Medication synchronization is the process of coordinating refills of a patient's medication so that they are able to pick them all up on a single day.[10] Many people miss doses of their regular medications and medication synchronization can improve the likelihood that patients take them appropriately.[11,12] Medication synchronization is a great way to help pharmacies to align patient refills, particularly for stable chronic medications. It saves time for patients by eliminating the need for multiple trips to the pharmacy, and improves efficiency at the pharmacy by eliminating multiple unnecessary transactions. Medication synchronization helps to create a proactive workflow, giving pharmacists the opportunity to intervene early and effectively. Although synchronizing medications may sound complicated initially, once implemented, the program is simple to maintain.

In recent years, we have seen a dramatic evolution in the scope of pharmacy practice. Enabling this new scope, however, requires important changes in the way that we practice. The pharmacy technician is fundamentally important to this process and is instrumental in optimizing workflow, medication management and adherence.

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QUESTIONS

Please select the best answer for each question and answer online at www.CanadianHealthcareNetwork.ca for instant results.

1. Which of the following is part of the scope of practice for registered pharmacy technicians?
a) Providing immunizations
b) Taking a verbal order on a prescription
c) Conducting clinical verification on a prescription
d) Counselling on a prescription

2. What is medication synchronization?
a) Where administration of a patient's medication is optimally coordinated throughout the day
b) Where a patient's medication is switched from shorter-acting to longer-acting formulations to optimize compliance
c) Where filling and dispensing of patients' medication are coordinated so all chronic medications are dispensed on the same day
d) When prescription medication is taken at the same time each day

3. Which of the following is not a benefit of medication synchronization?
a) Better adherence to medication
b) Fewer side effects from medication
c) Less workload for the pharmacy
d) Less burden on the patient

4. Which of the following can a registered pharmacy technician identify at the intake counter?
a) Poor adherence to medications
b) Poor understanding of medications
c) New disease diagnosis
d) All of the above

5. Which of the following can be performed by a registered pharmacy technician?
a) Demonstration of the features of a blood glucose meter
b) Describing the therapeutic use of an inhaler with an Aerochamber®
c) Application of a prescription medication patch
d) Administration of an intranasal corticosteroid

6. Registered pharmacy technicians can help to improve workflow efficiency in the pharmacy by doing all of the following, EXCEPT:
a) Accepting prescription transfers for narcotics
b) Accepting verbal orders for antihyperglycemic medication
c) Directing patients to order refills using automated telephone or online services
d) Proactively calling patients requiring refill renewal of chronic medication

7. Which of the following can affect dispensary workflow?
a) Prescription volume
b) Physical layout of the pharmacy
c) Level of staff experience
d) All of the above

8. Which of the following is a good candidate for a medication review?
a) A patient who is consistently late when refilling a prescription
b) A patient who has lost a prescription
c) A patient with no significant changes to their medication regimen
d) A patient who requires rebilling of a prescription to a new insurance plan

9. Which of the following is/are important for a technician to understand when promoting a clinical program?
a) The benefits of the program
b) What is being offered to the patient
c) Basic process for delivering the service
d) All of the above

10. Which of the following is an example of how the expanded role of a regulated pharmacy technician can free up pharmacists' time?
a) Counselling a patient

b) Answering the telephone
c) Giving a flu shot
d) Receiving a prescription transfer

11. Which of the following is an example of how technology can be used to improve dispensary productivity?
a) Using point-of-care screening during a medication review
b) Hiring a regulated pharmacy technician
c) Implementing an e-refill program for patients
d) Stop answering the telephone during busy periods

12. Which of the following is an example of an expanded pharmacist role?
a) Adaptation
b) Immunization
c) Prescription renewal
d) All of the above

13. A common cause of medication non-adherence is:
a) Complexity of medication regimen
b) The size of the prescription vial
c) Increasing number of medications

d) Both A and C

14. Registered technicians are well-positioned to identify patients that may benefit from professional programs because:
a) They are familiar with the generic names of medications
b) They manage the home delivery program
c) They are a primary point of contact for the patient
d) They have worked at the pharmacy for a long time

15. Compliance packaging can be beneficial because:
a) Patients can easily reseal a package once a blister has been broken
b) Patients know exactly when to take their medication
c) Patients can refer to their card if they suspect they may have forgotten to take or skipped a dose
d) Both B and C

16. A patient just purchased a glucometer and is asking you how it should be used.

Which of the following is true?
a) A pharmacy technician in Ontario can use the lancing device to demonstrate the use of a glucometer without the supervision of a pharmacist
b) A pharmacy technician in any province can provide instructions on how to use the glucometer
c) A pharmacy technician in Manitoba can provide explanation involving the interpretation of the results or value of the device
d) A & B

17. Which of the following is not part of the pharmacy technician's scope of practice in PEI?
a) Check the prescription for technical accuracy
b) Check the prescription for clinical appropriateness
c) Act as a preceptor to a pharmacy technician student
d) Gather, enter, and store prescription and patient information

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