

Hospital Pharmacy Technicians Perspectives on Their Changing Roles and Responsibilities

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Rationale

Through the Hospital Pharmacy in Canada Survey, information on contemporary hospital pharmacy practice issues is collected from pharmacy managers every two years.

There is little information available on how recent changes in the pharmacy profession are perceived by pharmacy technicians. Changes which affect technicians include the training/credentials that pharmacy technicians must possess, the functions they are expected to perform, the degree of responsibility/accountability they are expected to assume, and provincial requirements for licensure/registration as a pharmacy technician.

Objectives

This survey was conducted to determine pharmacy technician perspectives on a number of issues that they currently face.

Those issues include their present and future roles and responsibilities, accountability, liability, credentialing, and regulation.

Study Design and Methods

An on-line survey instrument was created to capture the view of pharmacy technicians on the issues described in the objectives.

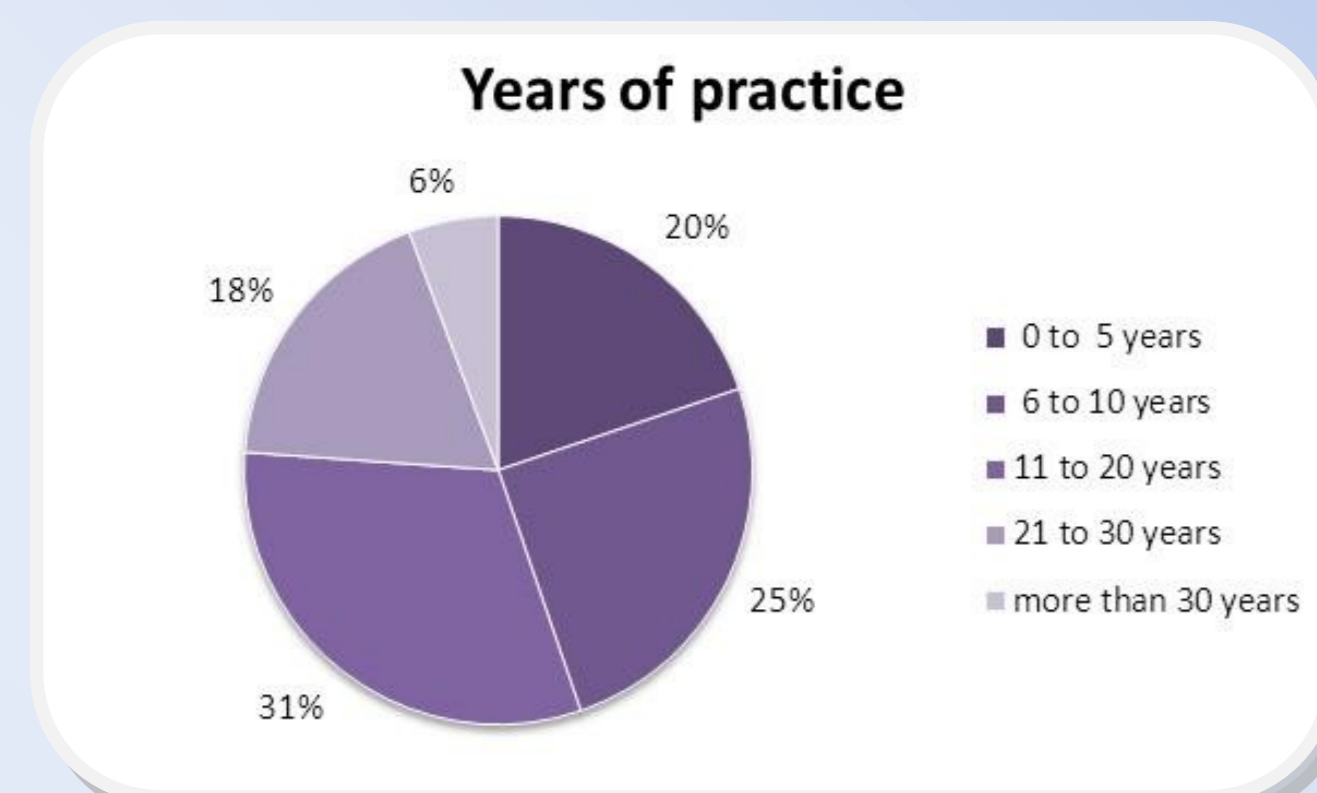
Pharmacy Directors in all Canadian hospitals with at least 50 acute care beds were asked to forward a survey link to each of their pharmacy technicians.

Descriptive statistical methods were used to analyze the results.

Pharmacy Technicians were also invited to provide unstructured comments related to the issues raised by the survey questions.

Results

A total of 666 pharmacy technicians from every Canadian province except Newfoundland and Labrador participated in the survey.



A large majority expressed their belief that they possessed the knowledge and skills to accurately and safely perform and/or check most of the 34 activities that were listed.

Activities where a majority of technicians expressed reservations about performing the task included:

- Preparing/checking oncology admixtures
- Performing/checking medication order entry
- Receiving verbal orders
- Verifying patient allergies
- Collecting/assembling medication use information
- Conducting medication use audits
- Collecting/assembling laboratory test results
- Calculating changes to parenteral nutrition

Respondents provided a long list of comments, many of which expressed anger and frustration with the way changes affecting them had been made.

Results

Table I Pharmacy Technicians Opinions on Skills

I possess the knowledge and skills required to accurately and safely...	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
... package unit dose items	2%	4%	14%	81%
... check the work of other technicians who package unit dose items	2%	4%	16%	78%
... fill unit dose trays	2%	3%	16%	79%
... check the work of other technicians who fill unit dose trays	3%	5%	16%	76%
... fill traditional multi-dose prescriptions	2%	2%	19%	77%
... check the work of other technicians who fill traditional multi-dose prescriptions	4%	10%	19%	67%
... restock automated dispensing cabinets	3%	8%	17%	71%
... check the work of other technicians who restock automated dispensing cabinets	4%	11%	19%	66%
... prepare batch IV admixtures	6%	8%	16%	71%
... check the work of other pharmacy technicians who prepare batch IV admixtures	10%	16%	19%	55%
... prepare patient-specific IV admixtures	10%	16%	19%	55%
... check the work of other pharmacy technicians who prepare patient-specific IV admixtures	11%	17%	19%	53%
... prepare oncology admixtures	15%	20%	20%	45%
... check the work of other pharmacy technicians who prepare oncology admixtures	24%	31%	18%	28%
... fill cardiac arrest trays with the required medications	3%	6%	21%	71%
... check the work of other pharmacy technicians who fill cardiac arrest trays with the required medications	5%	8%	21%	66%
... compound medication preparations (e.g ointments)	0%	1%	17%	81%
... check the work of other pharmacy technicians who compound medication preparations	3%	6%	20%	70%
... perform medication order entry	8%	15%	22%	55%
... check the work of other pharmacy technicians who perform medication order entry	16%	27%	23%	35%
... receive verbal orders	23%	33%	24%	20%
... verify patient allergy information	12%	22%	29%	37%
... serve as a pharmacy liaison and perform activities that improve the drug distribution system	13%	20%	27%	40%
... collect and assemble medication use information that is used to perform medication reconciliation on admission, transfer or discharge	15%	25%	25%	34%
... collect and assemble laboratory test results and other patient care data that is used by pharmacists in the care of their patients	23%	39%	20%	18%
... assemble pamphlets and documentation to be given to the patient by a pharmacist at the time of medication counseling	16%	29%	25%	30%
... prepare patient medication schedule to be given to the patient by the pharmacist at the time of patient counseling	17%	30%	27%	26%
... use established protocols and lab values to calculate changes to parenteral nutrition therapy	29%	46%	14%	11%
... gather and collate information used in the preparation of drug formulary submissions	22%	40%	22%	17%
... gather and collate information on non-compliance to formulary rules, etc.	22%	41%	22%	15%
... conduct medication-related audits (e.g., for the Medication Safety committee)	20%	33%	27%	21%
...teach and supervise pharmacy technician students	3%	7%	33%	56%
... provide inservice education/training to pharmacy technicians	6%	16%	34%	44%
... operate a remote dispensing site, without the physical presence of a pharmacist	19%	30%	24%	27%

Representative Comments Provided by Survey Respondents

"I agree with and understand the importance of certification and regulation, however I am very disappointed with the with the steps I have to take to prove my competency after 30+ years of working as a pharmacy technician"

" The certification and all related fees is nothing more than a cash grab. Not one of my co-workers, pharmacists and techs alike, see anything useful in this new "regulation". "

" As an older, seasoned Pharmacy Technician, I resent losing my title of Pharmacy Technician and being forced to take more education, expensive, difficult exams, etc., just to keep my job."

"With this costing approximately \$3000 to complete and being a single person with bills to pay, this is very difficult. There should be some sort of support."

" I feel we should have been grandfathered in, like all other regulated professions in the past, like (e.g. RNs) "

Table II Pharmacy Technician Responsibility, Accountability and Liability

Level of agreement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Once a pharmacist has reviewed and released a prescription for processing, pharmacy technicians possess the skills and abilities to be solely responsible for drug distribution activities	2%	5%	32%	61%
Pharmacy technicians should be directly responsible and accountable for their actions, or their failure to act	5%	10%	40%	44%
Pharmacy technicians should be required to have liability insurance	10%	13%	39%	38%

Table III Pharmacy Technician Awareness of the Changes They Face

Are you aware that....	Yes
Has your department held informational sessions with pharmacy technicians to explain what certification and regulation are, and their implications for pharmacy technicians?	56%
... a number of provinces have already introduced pharmacy technician regulation?	84%
... almost all other provinces are in the planning or implementation stage for pharmacy technician regulation?	71%
... the title of 'Pharmacy Technician' will be restricted to licenced pharmacy technicians?	82%
... registration as a Pharmacy Technician will be a requirement for 'Pharmacy Technician' positions?	81%
... individuals who are currently working as unlicensed pharmacy technicians... must write and pass two PEBC exams	80%
... the successful completion of the PEBC qualifying exam... will be required in order to apply for a license to practice as a Pharmacy Technician?	79%
... after Dec 31, 2015, unlicensed pharmacy technicians in Canada will no longer be able to write the Evaluating Exam?	66%

Conclusions

This survey provides valuable information on how technicians perceive the changes they are facing as the pharmacy profession undergoes a major transformation.

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