

# TECHtalk

SEPTEMBER 2017

## BY THE NUMBERS REGISTRATIONS DECLINING

Number of names added to the Pharmacy Technician Register by examination in 2016: **957**

Total names since 2009: **8,514**

Number of candidates who took the Qualifying Examination—Part I (MCQ) in 2016: **1,293** (compared to 2,000 in 2015)

Number of candidates who took the Qualifying Examination—Part II (OSPE): **1,294** (compared to 2,181 in 2015)

Number of candidates who wrote the Pharmacy Technician Evaluating Examination in 2016 at centres in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland: **333** (compared to 454 in 2015)

Source: Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada, 2017 Annual Board Meeting Summary, PEBC Update, Vol. 21, No. 1, March 2017.

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## TECH FINDS FULFILLMENT IN EDUCATION

### PHARMACY TECHNICIAN AMANDA

Puszczalowski had always wanted to teach. In fact, upon graduating from high school, she was torn between taking a teaching degree in history or going into healthcare. She chose healthcare, graduating from Welland, Ont.-based Niagara College in 2000 and then becoming regulated in 2011.

But she never gave up on her teaching aspirations, and soon realized she could have a career that spanned both fields. “I went through the [pharmacy assistant] program and started working in pharmacy and really enjoyed it, but knew that I wanted to do more,” she says. “So I started to apply for positions in teaching.” Before long, she landed a job at TriOS career college in Hamilton. However, she found the commute from her home in Welland to Hamilton somewhat daunting, so she applied to Niagara College. “I got a call about six years ago to teach a class,” she says, “and I’ve been there ever since.”

Puszczalowski is now coordinator of the pharmacy technician program at Niagara. In this capacity, she oversees the program, meeting with staff to discuss new developments in pharmacy and helping decide on student placements. She also continues to teach some courses, her favourite being legislation. Although conceding that the topic may be dry, she says she tries to make it relevant to students “by bringing in real experience and drawing it back to social media, which they all understand.”

While adapting to different types of learners can be challenging, says Puszczalowski, the rewards make it all worthwhile – “getting to see the students graduate at the end of two years, watching them grow and become excited about the profession, and hearing what their goals are going to be afterwards.”

Even after embarking on her teaching career, Puszczalowski continued to practise as a pharmacy technician at the Rexall pharmacy in Welland where she began working in her first year of college many years ago. With some family members suffering from diabetes, she has honed her expertise in that area, taking



every course and attending every presentation possible. Continuing her work as a pharmacy technician has helped her in her teaching career, she says. “Pharmacy is changing so quickly, and there are always updates or new drugs coming out. We see that at the pharmacy and then bring that experience back to the students.”

In January, this lifelong learner resigned her position as a pharmacy technician in order to start a degree in community health at Brock University, while continuing to teach. “Community health interested me because it directly relates to a pharmacy technician,” she explains. “I feel like this degree will really help with that because it looks at different aspects of healthcare, like obesity and diabetes, and the strain it’s putting on the healthcare system, which is directly related to the strain being put on pharmacies. It’s something that I’m truly passionate about. So I’ll just chip away at it slowly, and eventually, I’ll get it done.”

Not surprisingly, Puszczalowski advises recent pharmacy technician graduates to “keep learning.” With pharmacy constantly changing, she urges them “to understand that your training and education doesn’t end when you’re done school and you register with the College of Pharmacists. It’s really just beginning.”

Amanda Puszczalowski practises what she preaches.

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## Manitoba streamlines final check application for techs

**AT ITS JUNE 2017 COUNCIL MEETING,** the College of Pharmacists of Manitoba changed its Pharmacy Technician Final Check process.

Pharmacies can now submit their completed applications directly to the College for approval. This will streamline the approval process, making it more official and timely.

The College developed the Pharmacy Technician Final Check Application for use in both community and hospital pharmacies. The application process requires pharmacy managers and staff to assess current dispensing processes to determine the changes required for a pharmacy technician to perform the final check safely and in compliance with legislation.

## OCP developing strategy to better integrate techs

**THE ONTARIO COLLEGE OF PHARMACISTS** (OCP) is currently developing a strategy that will build on existing efforts to integrate pharmacy technicians in practice and allow them to work to their full scope. In addition to implementing core College programs, such as quality assurance, that will impact this goal, OCP will engage educators, pharmacy owners, corporations, and other stakeholders to support this strategy.

According to OCP Council, the voter participation rate in the most recent election for pharmacy technician positions on Council was only about 10 per cent. This poor response indicates low member engagement within the profession, particularly in community pharmacy. In fact, 81 per cent of the community pharmacies in which the College has done pharmacy assessments in the last three years report that they do not have pharmacy technicians working to scope on an average day.

At its meeting in June, Council received

a presentation on an integrated Scope of Practice Strategy, and endorsed the following elements:

1. Create an Advisory Committee to inform, support, align and identify partnerships with stakeholders.
2. Define best-practice models, and create a community of best practices to help facilitate growth.
3. Identify barriers and facilitators impacting utilization of pharmacy technicians to optimize pharmacist scope.
4. Establish an education and training agenda for entry and continuing education to enhance professional engagement for both professions.
5. Develop quality indicators to measure the impact of collaborative practice models on clinical pharmacy services and patient outcomes.

Council will receive regular progress updates as the Strategy is implemented.

## PTSA receives grant for five-year anniversary of regulation

**THE ALBERTA COLLEGE OF PHARMACISTS** (ACP) has presented the Pharmacy Technician Society of Alberta (PTSA) with a \$25,000 professional development grant, in recognition of the five-year anniversary of pharmacy technicians becoming a regulated health profession in that province.

PTSA surveyed Alberta pharmacy technicians to determine how best to invest the grant. "The PTSA board knew that deciding how the grant would be spent was an important decision, and looked to Alberta pharmacy technicians to share their ideas," says Laura Miskimins, PTSA president. "Responses to a survey conducted earlier this year for that purpose identified that pharmacy technicians want access to more online and self-study types of education opportunities. At this time, the grant money has not yet been allocated to

one specific project, but PTSA is putting significant effort into creating an education plan supported by a Web-based learning platform that will improve the availability of CE to pharmacy technicians across the province."

ACP Council president Taciana Pereira presented the award at a reception celebrating the milestone. "Our commitment to pharmacy technicians, regardless of practice environment, is to continue supporting their professional practice journey and ensure that they have the understanding, tools and knowledge to confidently perform at a high level," she said. "In fact, one of our five goals in our five-year strategic plan is to increase the integration of pharmacy technicians into pharmacy practice teams, to allow them to exercise responsibility for the roles they are authorized to do."



## Raising awareness of acetaminophen

### ACETAMINOPHEN IS WIDELY USED IN

Canada to treat pain and fever. While it is most commonly known by the brand name Tylenol, more than 700 over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription medicines contain acetaminophen, says Health Canada. These include medications to treat muscle pain, allergies, cold and flu, and menstrual symptoms.

The drug is safe and effective when used as directed, but there is a limit to how much should be taken in one day. According to the Institute for Safe Medication Practices Canada (ISMP Canada), acetaminophen has been identified as the leading cause of liver failure in Canada; approximately 4,500 Canadians are hospitalized for acetaminophen overdose annually, and about six per cent of these patients experience liver injury that may be irreversible.

Alice Watt, a pharmacist as well as medication safety specialist at ISMP Canada, says community pharmacy technicians and assistants can help prevent overdoses by drawing patients' attention to medications that contain acetaminophen, whether in a

prescription drug or OTC medication. "If the pharmacy technician or assistant notices that a patient has a product that contains acetaminophen, they could flag it to the pharmacist for counsel, or offer the patient the brochure 'Let's talk about acetaminophen'," available on Health Canada's acetaminophen information webpage at <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/drugs-health-products/let-s-talk-about-acetaminophen.html>.

"For example, every time you give out a Tylenol 1 bottle, you can provide that pamphlet with it," Watt suggests.

Hospital pharmacy technicians can also play an important safety role when performing a Best Possible Medication History (BPMH),

by asking patients about any OTC drugs they are taking regularly. "BPMH is something that med rec technicians do," says Watt. "If the patient is taking an OTC drug that contains acetaminophen, ask how many they would take on average per day," Watt suggests. "That's an important piece of information. I usually ask: 'On a really bad day, how many would you take? How many have you taken recently?' Because that might be a factor as to why they're in the hospital."

While it's not always possible in a community pharmacy setting to flag patients purchasing OTC products that contain acetaminophen, technicians and assistants who seize any opportunity to do so will be making a significant contribution to safer use of these medications.

### RESOURCES

- **Health Canada webpage on acetaminophen:** <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medical-devices/acetaminophen.html>
- **Spotlight on acetaminophen, ISMP Canada:** [https://safemedicationuse.ca/tools\\_resources/tips\\_acetaminophen.html](https://safemedicationuse.ca/tools_resources/tips_acetaminophen.html)

### FIVE QUESTIONS FOR PATIENTS TO ASK

ISMP Canada has collaborated with the Canadian Pharmacists Association, the Canadian Society for Hospital Pharmacists, Canadian Patient Safety Institute, and Patients for Patient Safety Canada to develop a set of five questions to help patients and caregivers start a conversation about medications with their healthcare provider, as follows:

1. **Changes?** Have any medications been added, stopped or changed, and why?
2. **Continue?** What medications do I need to keep taking, and why?
3. **Proper use?** How do I take my medications, and for how long?
4. **Monitor?** How will I know if my medication is working, and what side effects do I watch for?
5. **Follow-up?** Do I need any tests, and when do I book my next visit?

Watt says pharmacy technicians and assistants can promote safe medication use by introducing this tool to patients. "That should prompt patients to ask these questions of their pharmacist," she says.

"Acetaminophen falls into the proper use question," adds Watt. "How do I properly use this medicine that has acetaminophen in it? And what to monitor."

Pharmacies can download a printable form of "The Five Questions" for distribution, and include their logo upon request, at <https://www.ismp-canada.org/medrec/5questions.htm>.



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