



Regulation of pharmacy technicians

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society intends to open a voluntary register of pharmacy technicians in January 2005. This article gives an overview of the framework that is being put in place and gives some more detail on some of the documents and guidance recently approved by the Council.

The Government will soon open consultation on the new regulatory framework for pharmacists, which will be mirrored by a regulatory framework for pharmacy technicians. Legislation that will enable the Society to change the pharmacists' framework and regulate pharmacy technicians in a similar manner is being sought via an Order under Section 60 of the Health Act 1999. The components of this framework are:

- Standards for education and training
- Registration
- Protection of title
- Code of ethics
- Continuing professional development
- Fitness to practise

Education and training

In the long term there will be a single standard for pharmacy technicians' education and training across Great Britain. This will be based on the Pharmacy Services level 3 Scottish or National Vocational Qualification (S/NVQ) and will include a requirement for the training programme to include an accredited underpinning knowledge programme and completion of work experience in a pharmacy. For a transitional period the Society will recognise a range of other pharmacy technician qualifications. The currently approved qualifications are as follows:

- S/NVQ level 3 in Pharmacy Services¹
- BTEC National Certificate in Science (pharmaceutical)
- BTEC National Certificate in Applied Science (pharmaceutical)

- BTEC National Certificate in Pharmacy Services
- SCOTEC National Certificate in Pharmaceutical Science
- SCOTVEC National Certificate in Pharmaceutical Science
- SQA National Certificate in Pharmaceutical Science
- City & Guilds of London Institute, dispensing technicians certificate
- Certificate of the Society of Apothecaries
- Dispensing certificate of the Royal Army Medical Corps or the Royal Air Force
- NPA two-year dispensing technicians correspondence course completed before 1998
- Boots two-year dispenser training programme completed before 1993

An accredited top-up training programme is being developed to enable Boots-trained dispensers who completed their training after 1993 and who are working in the community sector to register during the transitional period. Some locally-approved Scottish qualifications are still under consideration and a decision on these is expected soon.

Registration

Everyone applying to the Society to register as a pharmacy technician will have to provide evidence of an approved qualification. In addition, they will have to provide evidence of recent work experience undertaking the roles and responsibilities of a pharmacy technician. Under the grandparenting arrangements there will be two routes to registration:

- Route a: straightforward applications requiring no screening
- Route b: applications requiring screening by professional screeners appointed by the Society

The Society has set criteria for the minimum amount of work experience and has approved guidance on the types of work experience that will be acceptable for registration purposes (see p3). This will help applicants to determine whether they should apply under route a or route b.

In the long term, the work experience requirement has been set as two years of consecutive, recently completed, work-based experience in a pharmacy of 14 hours per week or equivalent (the training period can be included in this). For those applying under grandparenting arrangements, the standard work experience requirements have been set as:

- Not less than 14 hours per week for four out of the last eight years; or
- Not less than 28 hours per week for two out of the last four years

Applications from people who have a recognised qualification but who fall outside these criteria will be subject to screening. The same will apply to people applying to register who have a recognised qualification but are not currently working under the supervision, direction or guidance of a pharmacist. Separate procedures are being developed for pharmacy technicians with qualifications gained outside the UK. Further information on these is available from the Society.

Protection of title

The Society expects that the Section 60 Order will make provision for the title "pharmacy technician" to become protected in law. This is likely to take effect two years after the commencement of statutory registration. What this means in practice is that after the end of the transitional period it will be a legal requirement for anyone who wishes to use the title "pharmacy technician" to be registered with the Society.

Code of Ethics

Like pharmacists, every pharmacy technician applying to register with the Society will have to sign a declaration stating that they will keep to a Code of Ethics. Earlier in the year the Society and the Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK consulted jointly on a draft Code of Ethics for Pharmacy Technicians. After consideration of the responses a final version has been approved, and is reproduced on pp3-4 of this document. The technicians' code is based on

1. The inclusion of this qualification in the list should enable those registering for the S/NVQ in the autumn of 2004 to fulfil the requirements for registration under the grandparent clause

Pharmacy Technicians' Code of Ethics

Part 1: Key responsibilities of a pharmacy technician

■ At all times pharmacy technicians must act in the interests of patients and other members of the public and seek to provide the best possible health care for the community in partnership with all the health professions. Pharmacy technicians must treat all those who seek professional services with courtesy, respect and confidentiality. Pharmacy technicians must respect patients' rights to par-

ticipate in decisions about their care and must provide information in a way in which it can be understood.

■ Pharmacy technicians must ensure that their knowledge, skills and performance are of high quality, up to date, evidence based and relevant to their field of practice.

■ Pharmacy technicians must ensure that they behave with integrity and honesty, adhere to

accepted standards of personal and professional conduct and do not engage in any behaviour or activity likely to bring the profession of pharmacy into disrepute or undermine public confidence in the profession.

■ A pharmacy technician must not represent himself or herself as other than a pharmacy technician.

Part 2: Standards of professional performance

A. Personal responsibilities

Pharmacists have overall responsibility for the pharmaceutical services provided to patients. Pharmacy technicians undertake work to support, provide or develop these services and are responsible for their own professional actions.

There may be situations where a pharmacy technician works, for example, for a dispensing doctor or primary care organisation, and there is no pharmacist taking overall responsibility for the services provided to patients. In this situation, another healthcare professional, for example a medical practitioner, should take overall responsibility for the service being provided by the pharmacy technician.

Pharmacy technicians' prime concern, irrespective of their sphere of work, must be for the wellbeing and safety of patients and the public. Some roles pharmacy technicians undertake attract specific responsibilities. For example, when pharmacy technicians have managerial responsibilities they must ensure that procedures designed to minimise risks are formulated and applied. Pharmacy technicians providing professional services in any sphere of practice must ensure that their own work procedures are safe and effective.

The public and the profession are entitled to expect that pharmacy technicians providing services will comply with the specific professional responsibilities associated with them and comply with any other accepted codes of practice and statutory requirements applicable to their sphere of practice.

Pharmacy technicians must only work within the limits of their knowledge and expertise and referral to a pharmacist or other appropriate authority¹ must be made where appropriate.

A.1 Pharmacy technicians providing professional services

Pharmacy technicians are responsible for their own actions regardless of whether or

not they are in a position to control or influence the practice, business or institutional arrangements within which they are practising, and must ensure that:

- (a) they only accept work where they have the requisite skills and fitness for the tasks to be performed. All pharmacy technicians must establish sufficient information about the work to enable an assessment to be made;
- (b) they undertake continuing professional development relevant to their professional duties;
- (c) all activities they undertake are covered by professional indemnity arrangements;
- (d) they work in conditions that enable them to comply with the key responsibilities of a pharmacy technician;
- (e) the requisite facilities, equipment and materials are accessible to enable the provision of the services to professionally accepted standards;
- (f) if any tasks are to be delegated they are delegated to persons competent to perform them;
- (g) they and other staff work within standard operating procedures where these exist;
- (h) they agree terms and conditions and abide by them;
- (i) they honour commitments to provide professional services unless this is impossible. If they are not able to honour a commitment the pharmacy owner or other responsible person must be informed at the earliest opportunity in order that alternative arrangements may be made;
- (j) they take action to report to the supervising pharmacist or, where this is not possible, other appropriate authority when they become aware of a suspected drug interaction, adverse drug reaction or inappropriate prescribing so that a decision can be made as to the best course of action for the benefit of the patient;
- (k) before accepting employment they disclose any factors which may affect their ability to provide services. Where pharmacy technicians' religious or personal convictions prevent them from providing a

service they must not condemn or criticise the patient. They must refer the patient to a pharmacist or pharmacy technician who is able to provide the service. If there is no one able to provide the service, they must advise the patient of alternative sources for the services requested;

- (l) if they become aware that a person has received pharmaceutical care of a standard less than the person had a right to expect, whether or not they are the person responsible, they should refer to a pharmacist or, where this is not possible, other appropriate authority for advice or provide an explanation of what happened if it is within their competence to do so.;
- (m) they act quickly to protect patients and the public from risk by reporting the matter to an appropriate person, authority or regulatory body if they have good reason to believe that they or a colleague from their own or another profession may not be fit to practise for reasons of health, conduct or competence. The safety of patients and the public must be the prime consideration, over-riding any personal, professional or commercial loyalties.

A.2 Pharmacy technicians who own a pharmacy² and pharmacy technician managers in hospitals, trusts or other fields of practice

The pharmacist owner, superintendent pharmacist or pharmacist manager in a hospital or trust assumes additional responsibilities as set out in the Pharmacists' Code of Ethics in section A2. They will assume overall responsibility for ensuring that the standards set out in Section A2 are complied with.

Pharmacy technicians assuming the role of pharmacy owner or manager in a hospital or trust must support the responsible pharmacist in these duties and must not undertake any action that would prevent them from com-

1. We have included the words "or other appropriate authority" to take account of the fact that some pharmacy technicians may work for dispensing doctors or primary care organisations and may be unable to refer to a pharmacist

2. Although pharmacy technicians are not able to be sole owners, under Scottish law a pharmacist may own a pharmacy in partnership with a non-pharmacist

plying with the standards set out in Section A2 of the pharmacists' Code of Ethics.

A.3 Pharmacy technicians assessing or supervising student pharmacy technicians

Pharmacy technicians assessing or supervising student pharmacy technicians must ensure that:

- (a) student pharmacy technicians they assess understand and comply with the key responsibilities of a pharmacy technician and are competent. The public may be put at risk if an assessor or supervisor confirms the competence of a trainee who has not attained the required standard;
- (b) student pharmacy technicians receive wide-ranging experience, relative to the mandatory and specific optional S/NVQ units;
- (c) student pharmacy technician training meets the needs of the student including the workplace training and underpinning knowledge programmes;
- (d) student pharmacy technicians are properly supervised, in particular in relation to their responsibilities for services to the public;
- (e) the progress of student pharmacy technicians is reviewed regularly, with honest and constructive feedback in line with the requirements of the S/NVQ;
- (f) student pharmacy technicians are encouraged to self-appraise their performance;
- (g) all assessment documentation provides honest and objective assessment of competence;
- (h) they reflect on work processes and outcomes, evaluate their own performance and take action to develop their expertise and knowledge.

B. Professional competence

The public, the profession and the NHS expect pharmacy technicians to develop their professional performance to provide a high level of care to patients.

- (a) Pharmacy technicians must continually review the skills and knowledge required for their field of practice, identifying

those skills or knowledge most in need of development or improvement and audit their performance as part of the review process.

- (b) Pharmacy technicians must, each year, undertake continuing professional development structured to meet their personal needs, and be able to provide evidence of such.
- (c) Pharmacy technicians must be aware of the limits of their knowledge and refer to a pharmacist or other appropriate authority where necessary, having gathered all the relevant information, where a patient requires information or advice on a medicine being supplied.
- (d) Pharmacy technicians giving advice to prescribers, patients and others must be able to demonstrate relevant competence and knowledge of medicines.
- (e) Pharmacy technicians must be alert to potential adverse drug reactions, drug interactions and inappropriate prescribing and respond accordingly within their professional competence.

C. Confidentiality

The public expects pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and their staff to respect and protect confidentiality. This duty extends to any information relating to an individual which may be acquired in the course of a pharmacy technician's professional activities. Confidential information includes personal details and medication, both prescribed and non-prescribed.

Pharmacy technicians must ensure that:

- (a) the confidentiality of information acquired in the course of their professional activities is respected and protected, and is disclosed only with the consent of the individual other than in the circumstances defined below in (b);
- (b) information is disclosed without the patient's consent only in the following circumstances:
 - (i) where the patient's parent, guardian or carer has consented to the disclosure and the patient's apparent age or health makes them incapable of consent;

- (ii) pharmacy technicians should be aware that information about services provided to adolescents should not normally be disclosed to their parents;
 - (iii) where disclosure of the information is to a person or body empowered by statute to require such a disclosure;
 - (iv) where disclosure is directed by a coroner, judge or other presiding officer of a court, Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales and Procurator Fiscal in Scotland;
 - (v) to a police officer or NHS fraud investigation officer who provides in writing confirmation that disclosure is necessary to assist in the prevention, detection or prosecution of serious crime;
 - (vi) where necessary to prevent serious injury or damage to the health of the patient, a third party or to public health;
- (c) they do not disclose information relating to the prescribing practices of identifiable prescribers or their practices, other than for the necessary purposes of the NHS or other health care provider, unless the prescriber has given his written, informed consent to the disclosure;
 - (d) access to confidential information within the pharmacy is restricted to those who require that information and who are themselves subject to an obligation of confidentiality;
 - (e) the requirements of data protection legislation for data collection and use are complied with;
 - (f) confidential information is effectively protected against improper disclosure when it is disposed of, stored transmitted or received;
 - (g) pharmacy computer and manual systems which include patient specific information incorporate access control systems to minimise the risk of unauthorised or unnecessary access to the data. Pharmacy computer systems which include patient specific information and which are linked to the internet or other network must incorporate measures such as data encryption to eliminate the risk of unauthorised access to confidential data.

Acceptable environments for work experience for technicians

The Society has defined acceptable work experience for registration as a pharmacy technician as that which is undertaken under the supervision, direction or guidance of a pharmacist. This definition is straightforward for most pharmacy technicians who work in community pharmacies or hospital pharmacy departments. However, pharmacy technicians are also employed in numerous other areas and the Society has issued guidance covering other environments that will be accepted as providing relevant work experience. The guidance covers the following areas:

- Hospital environments outside the pharmacy department
- NHS primary care organisations (PCOs)
- Pharmaceutical industry
- Pharmaceutical wholesalers
- Providers of health information or pharmacy-related IT systems
- Armed forces
- Ministry of Defence (MoD) civilian posts
- Schools of pharmacy, further education colleges involved in pharmacy technician education and training and other pharmacy training providers
- Pharmacy organisations, other national health-related organisations, professional bodies and employment agencies
- Pharmacy technicians working as journalists
- Locum pharmacy technicians
- Pharmacy technicians working as consultants
- GP practices, including dispensing GPs.

The full document is available from the following link on the Society's website: www.rpsgb.org/pdfs/techregworkexp.pdf.

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the pharmacists' version, which means that, in the future, the two codes will have to be reviewed together as part of the same process.

Continuing professional development

Participation in continuing professional development (CPD) is central to working as a professional. It will enable registered pharmacy technicians to demonstrate to employers, the NHS and patients that they are maintaining and building on their capabilities.

Pharmacy technicians will be able to register with the Society as either practising or non-practising. All pharmacy technicians will be registered as practising unless they sign and return a declaration to the Society stating that they do not, and will not, undertake any work in, or give advice in relation to, the science of medicines or the practice of pharmacy or healthcare. This reflects the new structure being put in place for pharmacists from January 2005.

CPD will be mandatory for all pharmacy technicians who are registered as practising. This means that practising pharmacy technicians will be required to undertake CPD and to document that they do so. The principles of CPD are the same for both pharmacists and technicians and the Society therefore intends to use the same recording system for both groups. A technicians' version of the Plan and Record documentation is being produced. As for pharmacists, all registered pharmacy technicians will receive a CPD pack containing a printed manual, but will be given the option, and encouraged, to record their CPD electronically. Both on- and off-line electronic systems will be made available.

Fitness to practise

The Society is putting procedures in place that will apply in the event of the identification of a pharmacy technician who does not work within the standards of conduct set by the Society. These will cover issues such as poor performance, ill health or misconduct and will apply in the following circumstances:

- When an application for registration is received from a pharmacy technician who has previous criminal convictions
- When there is a complaint that a registered pharmacy technician is practising in such a way that he or she is putting the public at risk

Policies have also been agreed that will prevent struck-off pharmacists from registering and working as pharmacy technicians.

In the future there is likely to be a single set of fitness-to-practise procedures covering both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

Initial complaints will be considered by an Investigating Committee and, where necessary cases will be referred to either a disciplinary committee or a health committee, as appropriate. Membership of these committees will be drawn from larger panels comprising pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and lay persons. It is envisaged that a case against a pharmacy technician would be normally considered by a committee comprising pharmacy technicians and lay members but there are circumstances in which it would be appropriate to appoint a committee that included both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

Fee structure and fees

A fee will be payable on registration and there will be an annual retention fee to remain on the register that will fall due on 1 January each year. The fee payable on initial registration will depend upon whether or not the application requires screening and, during 2005, the quarter of the year in which the application for registration is submitted to the Society. The fees for 2005 are set out in the following table:

Table 1: Fee structure and fees for 2005

REGISTRATION FEES		
(On initial registration this fee will be paid <i>in addition to</i> the retention fee)		
Type of application	Fee	
Standard (S/NVQ level 3 in pharmacy services plus accredited underpinning knowledge)	£30	
Standard with screening (overseas)	£125	
Grandparent without screening	£30	
Grandparent with screening	£125	
RETENTION FEES FOR 2005		
(On initial registration this fee will be payable <i>in addition to</i> the registration fee)		
Period in which application for registration is made	Practising	Non-practising
January to March (annual fee)	£85	£65
April to June	£64	£50
July to September	£43	£35
October to December	£22	£20

Applying for registration

Pharmacy technicians wishing to apply for registration with the Society will first need to complete an application form. An application pack, including detailed guidance on how to complete the form, is currently being put together and it is anticipated that these will be made available in the autumn. A number of supporting documents will need to be forwarded to the Society with the application.

These include:

- Evidence of identity (copy of birth certificate or a statutory declaration)
- Health declaration (this is a statement signed by a medical practitioner)
- A copy of the qualification certificate
- Self-declaration of criminal convictions

All applications for registration, including any photocopied documents, will need to be countersigned by a pharmacist. A guidance document for countersigning pharmacists has recently been approved.

Being on the register

All registered pharmacy technicians will be allocated a five-digit number preceded with the letters PT. They will also receive a registration certificate which will state whether they are registered as practising or non-practising. The CPD pack will be sent to all new registrants in the month following registration. Registered pharmacy technicians will also receive *The Pharmaceutical Journal* weekly as part of the registration package. As with pharmacists, *The Journal* will publish any official notices relating to the technicians' register.

How the Society is gearing up

One of the biggest challenges for the Society in taking this work forward has been communication with technicians themselves. The Society has worked closely on the development of the framework with the Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK and other key stakeholders, but with no register it is still difficult to ensure that the relevant information reaches those who need to know. Since the beginning of April pharmacy technicians and others with an interest in technician registration have been invited to submit their contact details to the Society via a data collection form on the support staff section of its website. At the time of going to press contact details of more than 2,600 pharmacy technicians have been collected via the website and through direct contact with the Society.

Despite a few remaining unresolved issues, the Society remains confident that it will be in a position to open its voluntary register in January 2005. The technician registration system will be in place and ready for testing in the autumn and piloting work, which will involve inviting a sample of pharmacy technician contacts to submit their application for registration to the Society, will start as soon as possible after that. Although it is still difficult to predict with any certainty how many will opt for voluntary registration, there is no doubt that 2005 will be remembered as a watershed in the development of pharmacy technicians as a profession.

Further information is available by visiting the pharmacy support staff page on the Society's website (www.rpsgb.org/pharmacysupportstaff) and clicking on the *pharmacy technician* link on the right hand side of the page. Pharmacy technicians who have not already done so are invited to submit their contact details to the Society by completing the online form available from this link