



Maximizing Technician Roles in Sterile IV Compounding

Pharmacy technicians have been providing invaluable services within the pharmacy under the supervision of pharmacists, as long as pharmacists have been in the business of providing medication therapy to patients. As the pharmacy profession has progressed from a dispensing role to more clinically focused positions, technicians are increasingly being placed in less traditional roles in the pharmacy (see Table 1 below). Given the current economic climate surrounding health care, taking full advantage of the skills of well-trained, qualified technicians can be a cost effective solution to handling many non-clinical functions within the pharmacy. One area of pharmacy operations where technicians can provide such a solution is sterile compounding.

Enhancing Technician Roles in Sterile Compounding

Technicians are already used regularly for sterile compounding duties, and in the pursuit of achieving USP Chapter <797> compliance, many hospitals have introduced new roles for technicians in this area. In fact, some hospitals have been able to add to the pharmacy workforce to help comply with USP <797> by justifying additional technician positions comprising duties traditionally held by pharmacists such as conducting training and competency assessments.

Lead Pharmacy Technicians

One way to maximize technician skills in the sterile compounding area is to estab-

lish a lead technician for sterile compounding. In general, lead technicians are charged with managing an area in the pharmacy and/or other technicians. Typical duties that accompany this leadership position include training, documentation, and quality assurance for either the location within the pharmacy or the personnel. For example, a lead IV technician may not only be responsible for training and competency assessment of other technicians in the area, but also for stocking levels and regulatory oversight of the area.

Another option is to appoint a training specialist as opposed to a lead technician. This person would be responsible for the training of new hires as well as ongoing training required to meet The Joint Commission and state boards of pharmacy regulations.

Compliance Technicians

With pharmacists increasingly being placed in medication safety officer positions at their institutions, regulatory affairs or compliance technicians also are gaining popularity. In this role, technicians assist with medication safety officer duties including documentation, policy and procedure oversight and updates, dissemination of new information or policies and procedures to staff, quality assurance, training and testing staff, and collecting background information for use in FMEAs. Technicians in this position may be charged with assisting in all areas of the pharmacy, not just the IV sterile compounding area. The quality assurance technician role is similar to that of the regulatory affairs or compliance technician. However,

Table 1. Emergent Pharmacy Technician Roles

Technician roles have been expanding into areas traditionally handled by pharmacists. The list below outlines some of the nascent roles and responsibilities of pharmacy technicians at various institutions throughout the country. While this list is not all-inclusive, it illustrates how pharmacy technician skills are being maximized.

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| ■ Medication safety technician | ■ Clinical technician for: | ■ College/school pharmacy lab tech |
| ■ Patient appointment scheduling and follow-up | • Anticoagulation, hypertension, diabetes, refill, | ■ Immunization services coordinator |
| ■ Measuring and recording patient laboratory values | medication assistance, pharmacokinetics, MTMS | ■ Compounding technician |
| ■ Documenting medication adherence information | ■ Controlled substances inventory and audits | • Sterile compounding |
| ■ Investigational drug service | ■ Medication disposal and destruction | • Non-sterile compounding |
| ■ Inventory control specialists | ■ Equipment calibration and maintenance | ■ Information technology specialist |
| ■ Medication assistance coordination | ■ Pharmacy buyer | ■ Drug utilization reviewer |
| ■ Medicare Part D specialists | ■ Third party insurance coordination | ■ Poison control center technicians |
| ■ Technician educator | ■ Pharmacy training coordinator | ■ Data analyst technician |
| ■ Tech-check-tech | ■ Quality assurance or regulatory compliance technician | ■ Customer service/triage technician |
| ■ Pharmacy benefits manager | ■ Patient safety officer | ■ Pharmacy automation specialist |



Pharmacy Technicians

The need for standardized pharmacy technician education and training and formalized competency-based training programs is pressing, and as the roles of technicians expand, this is an even greater concern. While many pharmacy organizations, including the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) and ASHP are focusing on this challenge, most technicians currently rely on on-the-job training to learn their positions.

Making the Case for New Positions

While these unique technician positions can help a pharmacy run more efficiently, considering the current economic environment, many institutions may not have the funds available for new roles. To build a case for new positions at your institution, include points such as the benefits to patients and personnel, the regulatory implications of not adding the new positions, and the cost benefits.

To justify the position, it may be necessary to get creative about how the person hired is deployed. For example, if you are part of a health system, consider creating a system-wide position. The technician would travel between sites to conduct training and periodic quality assurance testing; their responsibilities do not have to be limited to sterile compounding either.

Training Considerations

When it comes to the training of technicians performing any duties within the sterile compounding area, at the very least, they need to be held to the USP Chapter <797> training requirements for compounding sterile products. These baseline skills can then be built upon depending on the duties to be performed. For instance, if the technician will be responsible for overseeing all of the media fill testing, they should not only pass their own media fill test, they also should be witnessed proctoring a media fill test appropriately to another employee and completing proper documentation.

Outlining Responsibilities

If the technician role is a leadership position, then it is important to clearly outline which staff the employee will be responsible for. For example, if a pharmacy technician is the sterile compounding training technician or compliance

technician, designate which staff members they will be training and testing. It is possible that the technician may even be overseeing some of the pharmacists' training. With that in mind, check the regulations in your state, as some state regulations prohibit a pharmacy technician from training a pharmacist to make sterile compounds and signing off on new hire competencies. If this is the case, then perhaps the technicians only train technicians and pharmacists train both pharmacists and technicians. Either way, managers should clearly delineate this role to the trainer and the trainees. A less obvious example of this is a pharmacy technician who is responsible for quality assurance monitoring. Indirectly, the technician may oversee the work that is being done by a pharmacist if the pharmacist is compounding sterile products. Check your state regulations to be sure this is allowed.

Keep in mind that while it is important to clearly define roles to the individual in the position, it is just as important to communicate the new roles and responsibilities of the individual to the entire pharmacy staff.

Conclusion

Pharmacy technicians are a valuable resource, and using these individuals to their fullest potential can allow pharmacists to take on more clinical responsibilities in the hospital, help cut costs, and streamline pharmacy operations. As the roles of technicians continue to push traditional boundaries, it is important to make sure that proper education and training and the support of pharmacy administration are available to ensure the success of individuals in these new positions. ■

References

1. Thompson CA. Legality of technicians' involvement in medication reconciliation not clear. *Am J Health Syst Pharm.* 2009;66(5):433-4.
2. NABP. 2009 Survey of Pharmacy Law. <http://www.nabp.net>. Accessed 2009.

Pharmacy technicians can play a vital role in special projects. A recent article co-written by Barbara L. Hintzen, a certified pharmacy technician (CPHT) who serves as a pharmacy operations manager, discusses a lean process improvement project she worked on involving the IV sterile compounding area of the pharmacy. The project decreased waste, streamlined efficiency, and recognized an estimated annual cost savings of over \$280,000.

For the full article see:

Hintzen BL, Knoer SJ, Van Dyke CJ, et al. Effect of lean process improvement techniques on a university hospital inpatient pharmacy. *Am J Health Syst Pharm.* 2009;66 (22):2042-7.



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