

Regulation of pharmacy technicians

The voluntary register of pharmacy technicians was opened in January 2005 in anticipation of new legislation that will give the Society powers to establish a new statutory register, thereby creating a new regulated profession. This document gives an overview of the framework that is being put in place and gives some more detail on some of the Council's decisions.

1. Background

The Council agreed to move towards the regulation of all support staff groups as part of the regulatory reform of the Society in December 2001. A steering group was set up early in 2002 with a remit to make recommendations to the Council on the regulatory framework. The steering group's recommendations were made in the context of pharmacy technicians' developing roles, discussions on skill mix within pharmacy and strong indications within external policy documents including NHS plans that the government was looking to require all groups of support workers whose work impacted on the clinical care of patients to be regulated.

Proposals for the regulation of pharmacy technicians by the Society which would include a requirement for registration, were adopted by the Council in December 2002 following consultation via the Pharmaceutical Journal in with relevant stakeholders in June 2002 and a further consultation with relevant stakeholders in September 2002.

The government is now consulting on draft legislation (Section 60 Order) that will reform the regulatory framework for pharmacists and create a new regulatory framework for pharmacy technicians that will mirror the new pharmacists' framework. The components of this framework are:

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

2. 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 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, that will continue for two years after the new legislation comes into force, the Society will recognise a range of other pharmacy technician qualifications and grandparenting arrangements will apply.

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3. 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 are 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. This will help applicants to determine whether they should apply under route a or route b.

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 have been developed for pharmacy technicians with qualifications gained outside the UK, but within the EEA and those with qualifications gained outside the EEA. Further information on these is available from the Society's Support Staff Section.

4. Protection of title

The Section 60 Order is likely to make provision for the titles “registered pharmacy technician” and “pharmacy technician” to become protected in law. The former is likely to take effect as soon as the legislation comes in to force and the latter, 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.

5. Code of ethics

Like pharmacists, every pharmacy technician applying to register with the Society, is required to sign a declaration stating that they will fully comply with a Code of Ethics. The current version of the code of ethics for pharmacy technicians is based on the

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pharmacists' version. A review of both codes is currently underway. Adherence to such a code is characteristic of a profession and the code includes a number of references to professional status, for example

- 'Pharmacy technicians must ensure that they ... adhere to accepted standards of personal and professional conduct'
- 'Pharmacy technicians ... are responsible for their own professional actions'
- 'Pharmacy technicians providing professional services ... 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'.

In relation to pharmacy technicians providing professional services, the Code goes on to state that; 'Pharmacy technicians are responsible for their own actions ... and must ensure that

- (b) they undertake CPD relevant to their professional duties;
- (c) all activities they undertake are covered by professional indemnity arrangements
- (i) they honour commitments to provide professional services.
- (m) they act quickly to protect patients ... if they have good reason to believe that they or a colleague from their own or another profession may not be fit to practise ...'

The Code further provides that; 'Pharmacy technicians must co-operate fully with any investigation into their or another pharmacist's, pharmacy technician's or other health care professional's fitness to practise'.

Under 'Professional Competence', the Code states that; 'The public, the profession and the NHS expect pharmacy technicians to develop their professional performance...', and that CPD records should contain evidence that a practising pharmacy technician 'evaluates what they have learned and effectively translates their learning into improved professional practice'. The Code also places an obligation on pharmacy technicians to ensure that 'the confidentiality of information acquired in the course of their professional activities is respected'.

6. CPD

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. Like pharmacists, pharmacy technicians are able to register with the Society as either *practising* or *non-practising*. All pharmacy technicians are registered as practising unless they sign and return a declaration to the Society stating that they are 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. CPD is mandatory for all pharmacy technicians who are registered as practising. This means that pharmacy technicians will be required to undertake CPD and to document that they do so. The

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principles of CPD are the same for both pharmacists and technicians and the same recording system is being used for both groups. A technicians' version of the Plan and Record documentation has been produced. All registered pharmacy technicians receive a CPD pack in the month following confirmation of their registration with the Society. The technicians' pack contains a printed manual, but like pharmacists, pharmacy technicians are given the option, and encouraged, to record their CPD electronically. Both on- and off-line electronic systems are available.

7. Fitness to practise

Interim procedures have been agreed that will be applied in the following circumstances:

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

The Section 60 Order is likely to provide for a single set of procedures covering both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians for dealing with issues such as poor performance, ill health or misconduct. Initial complaints will be considered by the Investigating Committee and, where necessary cases will be referred to either the Disciplinary Committee or Health Committee as appropriate. Membership of these committees will be drawn from larger panels comprising pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and lay members. 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 circumstances in which it would be appropriate to appoint a committee that included both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

Policies have also been agreed that will apply in the event of a struck-off pharmacist applying to register as a pharmacy technician.

8. Being on the register

All registered pharmacy technicians are allocated a 5-digit number preceded with the letters PT. They also receive a registration certificate which states whether they are registered as practising or non-practising. A CPD pack is sent to all new registrants in the month following registration. Registered pharmacy technicians 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.

Although there is no financial provision for pharmacy technicians to participate in RPSGB branch meetings many branches do already encourage technicians to attend when there is a relevant topic. The Society is able to provide the branches with contact details of registered pharmacy technicians within the branch area.

Janet Flint
Head of Support Staff Regulation