

The Pilot Pharmacy Technician workforce census: your questions answered

Pharmacy technicians across Britain should receive a census form from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society in early January 2010. We have detailed some questions and answers to address any queries or concerns you might have in completing the census questionnaire. However, please note that the Society's research team is available to answer any other queries that you may have (e-mail: practiceresearch@rpsgb.org; tel 020 7572 2278).

Why is the Society undertaking a pharmacy technician census?

The Society has undertaken four pharmacist workforce censuses - the first in 2002, and further ones in 2003, 2005 and 2008. These studies generated a huge amount of data that have been used to inform workforce planning and policy development across our profession. As a result of this investment, the Society has one of the most comprehensive workforce data sets in healthcare.

Following the introduction of statutory registration in July this year, the Society aims to generate an equally comprehensive workforce data set for pharmacy technicians. The Pilot Pharmacy Technician Census data will be particularly important in informing the establishment of the General Pharmaceutical Council and its registers. This will enable the new regulator to understand emerging workforce trends in order to support, register and regulate pharmacy technicians.

The Pilot Census data will allow the Society to create a snapshot of the pharmacy technician workforce today from which future censuses will be able to track changes in workforce patterns and identify any new and emerging trends in the workforce.

I don't work in pharmacy, so why should I complete the census form?

The Society recognises that not every pharmacy technician registered with the Society may be working in a pharmacy role. However, it is extremely important that all registrants complete and return the form so that the Society has a full and comprehensive picture of how many people do not work in pharmacy and to establish any intentions to return to pharmacy – an important issue in future workforce planning. Although there is no obligation on any pharmacy technician, working or not, to complete and return the census, it is hoped that you will do so. If you are not working in pharmacy we only need you to answer up to Question 3, so it should not take up too much of your time.

How will the results be used?

The aggregated results will be used by the Society to ensure that policies around workforce are informed by factual data directly provided by the membership. A summary report of the characteristics of the pharmacy technician workforce will be produced and made available on the Society's website. Information on the results will also be made available to the pharmacy press.

Why is my registration number on the form?

Your registration number is on the form to enable the independent external research team to access data relating to demographic characteristics such as gender and age. The Society itself does not have access to the individual census response forms.

The inclusion of registration numbers on the form also allows the research team to establish the demographic characteristics of those who do not complete and return the form. This information on the non-responders means that we are able to ascertain how reliable the data collected through the census are.

Who will have access to my responses?

In line with the Society's registration with the Information Commissioner we are able to use data for research purposes. Further information is available from the Information Commissioner's website (www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk). The University of Manchester has been commissioned to manage the pharmacy technician workforce census and researchers there will analyse the findings. Society staff will only see the aggregated data and will not be able to identify individual pharmacy technicians or their responses.

Do I have to answer all the questions on the form?

There is no statutory requirement for pharmacy technicians to complete the census form so you are under no obligation to answer any of the questions. Even if you do not feel able to answer one or more of the questions we would still be grateful if you could answer the other questions and return the form as any information provided will be helpful.

Why do you want to know the full postcode of where I work?

This information helps us to understand regional workforce issues such as whether the workforce shortage is concentrated in particular areas.

As a hospital pharmacy technician, why do you want to know what grade (pay scale) I am on?

Agenda for Change (the new pay system in the NHS) aims to introduce fairer pay, harmonised terms and conditions, career and pay progression and a more transparent reward system for staff who work outside normal hours. Getting a clear picture, at this early stage, of where pharmacy technicians sit in the pay scale and whether, over time, the aims of career and pay progression come to fruition for pharmacy technicians will enable the Society to work with policy makers to address notable issues and make comparisons with other NHS employees.

Why do you want to know about my CPD activity?

This information helps us to understand the types of CPD activity that are currently being undertaken within the profession, allowing us to direct resources to provide support for registrants in planning, undertaking and recording their CPD in the most efficient and effective way. As stated before, Society staff will only see the aggregated data and will not be able to identify individual pharmacy technicians or their responses.

Can I complete the Census questionnaire online?

No - currently the Register of pharmacy technicians does not hold a large number of email addresses and therefore, communicating with pharmacy technicians through a hard copy questionnaire is currently the most cost effective approach. In addition, past experience has shown online surveys result in relatively poor response rates when compared with hard copy returns. However, we recognise that some pharmacy technicians would prefer to access surveys online and this will be a consideration for future workforce activities.

My census form was sent to the wrong address. What should I do?

Please contact the registration team to verify that we hold your correct registered address. Any discrepancies concerning your address can be amended over the telephone and a replacement census questionnaire can be provided if required.

Is the Census paid for out of my retention fee?

No – the Census is being funded by the Department of Health in order to ensure that, in the transitional period, the General Pharmaceutical Council has essential data relating to its workforce.

There was no envelope enclosed with my form. What should I do?

The census can still be returned by freepost. Please return the questionnaire in an envelope addressed to: Pharmacy Workforce, PO Box 99, FREEPOST, ANG 10016, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 6SN.