COLLEGE OF PHARMACISTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Safe and Effective Pharmacy Care

Report on the 2008 Pharmacy Technician Focus Groups: Executive Summary

In the fall of 2008, the College of Pharmacists of BC sponsored and facilitated a series of nine pharmacy technician focus groups across the province. The primary purpose of these were to gather information that would help the College enhance the proposed pharmacy technician regulation process in BC and contribute to the development of relevant educational bridging programs for pharmacy technicians.

Direct input from BC practicing pharmacy technicians was viewed as vital to the development and implementation of the regulation process, scheduled for introduction in 2010.

As an integral part of the focus groups, the College also wanted to validate the draft Competencies and Standards of Practice for Pharmacy Technicians that had been developed during the summer of 2008, based on the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA) Professional Competencies for Canadian Pharmacy Technicians at Entry-to-Practice. This original document, while useful, appeared to have significant gaps and was viewed as not adequately rigorous for assessment purposes or sufficiently detailed for curriculum development purposes, both of which would be significant components of the pharmacy technician regulation process.

Of the 259 participants who attended the focus groups, slightly more than half were from community practices, 30% from hospital practices and 20% from pharmacy technicians who reported working in community *and* hospital practices or other types of settings. Participants expressed a high level of satisfaction with the focus groups, e.g., 99% stated that the focus group met its expressed purpose well or very well and 98% stated that the focus group met their personal expectations well or very well.

Data from the focus groups confirms the validity of the Competencies and Standards of Practice document with the "criticality"[1] for almost all Elements of Competence and Activities rated as 3.5 or higher on a four-point scale. Only three Elements and three Activities received an average rating of less than 3.5. The three Activities are:

Competence Activity	**Rating**
Support the patient to select therapeutic plan options	3.19
Promote and market the pharmacy practice	3.22
Contribute to the viability of the practice	3.13

These, of course, are almost always the primary responsibility of the pharmacist, regardless of practice type. However, during most focus group discussions, pharmacy

[1] "Criticality" in this context was defined as the relevance of each Element or Activity to ensuring patient safety *and* the technician's role in contributing to that safety.

technicians said they would have rated the second two Activities higher had they realized the full scope and intent of these, e.g., viability depends the careful use of materials, time and human resources.

The data indicate that 80% of all focus group respondents either currently perform or think they should perform all but two of the Activities under regulation. An analysis by Competency Unit reveals that 90% of pharmacy technicians already perform most of the Activities in Role 2, Select, Package and Distribute Drug Preparations and Products.

An analysis of the other Competency Units reveals differences by practice type, for example, in Competency Unit 1, more hospital pharmacy technicians (98%) report that they "Develop a professional relationship with the pharmacists and other heath care professions" (1.A.1) than community pharmacy technicians (65%). On the other hand, 88% of community pharmacy technicians report that they "Develop a professional relationship with the patient" (1.A.2) compared with 25% of hospital pharmacy technicians. These types of differences are most often attributable to the very different nature and culture of each respective practice setting and the job expectations and opportunities for pharmacy technicians.

When asked to consider and rate potential areas in which some professional development would be required prior to regulation, more than half of the pharmacy technicians rated these 10 areas most highly:

Potential Professional Development Areas

Foundation sciences (pharmacology, common medical conditions and related drug therapy, medical terminology, etc.)
Legislation
Business management
Technology and innovations
Calculations
Error management
Accountability
Ethics
Critical thinking and problem solving
Drug distribution

These areas are comparable to those identified in Ontario by the Ontario College of Pharmacists during their 2007 pharmacy technician focus groups series.

In describing their learning strategy preferences for bridging programs most pharmacy technicians indicated a preference for on-the-job training followed by in-person courses. Seminars, workshops and speaking with colleagues were also highly rated. A comparable number of pharmacy technicians also said they preferred or would use on-line or Web-based courses; in contrast a number of respondents said they would *not* use paper-based correspondence courses.

Pharmacy technicians identified a number of key issues related to regulation. These too are similar to those issues identified in Ontario and include topics such as accountability, gaining the respect of pharmacists and patients, the fees associated with regulation, information about the regulation process (in particular the assessments), and the implications of *not* seeking regulation. Pharmacy technicians were also asked to identify any key messages for the College that could enhance the registration process. The most recurring message was: Regulation offers an exciting opportunity for us—and the people of British Columbia—so please "keep us in the loop" and let us know how we can best prepare to meet the demands of regulation.

Based on a review of the outcomes of the 2008 pharmacy technician focus groups and a comparison of these outcomes with the work currently underway in Ontario, eight recommendations have been identified:

1. Continue to work towards the implementation of the pharmacy technician regulation process, building on the ideas, commitment and enthusiasm of pharmacy technicians and other key stakeholder groups
2. Establish a working group to guide the regulation process to address issues as they emerge over the next several years
3. Complete the validation of the Competencies and Standards of Practice components (Performance Indicators and Knowledge and Skill Specifications) so the full document is ready for use for education and training, human resource development, and assessment purposes
4. Develop a communication strategy that highlights the benefits of pharmacy technician regulation to pharmacists, pharmacies, pharmacy technicians, employers and the public[2]
5. Facilitate a series of information sessions for pharmacists, employers and other key stakeholders to disseminate the outcomes of this report and highlight the benefits of pharmacy technician regulation to all stakeholder groups
6. Identify and coordinate an advocacy group that can address some of the key human resource issues raised by pharmacy technicians, e.g., wages, union agreements, etc.
7. Facilitate a meeting with interested education and training providers to describe the implications of regulation to pharmacy technicians and to explore use of the Competence and Standards of Practice in the development or modification of curriculum for either full pharmacy technician programs and/or bridging programs
8. Support and contribute to the national implementation of pharmacy technician regulation to maximize career pathing opportunities for pharmacy technicians and enhance mutual recognition agreements between and among provinces

[2] Part of this recommendation includes the dissemination of the Business Case for Regulated Pharmacy Technicians, prepared by the BC College of Pharmacists in 2007.