The role of a pharmacy technician
GPhC workshop in collaboration with APTUK
APTUK conference, 12 June 2015

Summary

Overview:
Two parallel workshops were held at the APTUK annual conference 2015 to discuss the role of the pharmacy technician and how that role may change in the future.

1. What tasks and activities do pharmacy technicians currently undertake?

The first session focused on identifying all of the possible tasks and activities that pharmacy technicians working in all different sectors undertake, and then attempting to group the tasks into categories. A large number of tasks and activities were identified and then grouped.

Here is a word cloud of the key words that came up in the discussion:
The key tasks and activities identified were:

- **Medicines management**: including dispensing, accuracy checking, medicines safety, audits, medicines reconciliation, medicines administration, stock control
- **Providing advice to patients about their medicines**: including giving information and advice to patients about their medicines, training in self-administration of medicines, supporting medicines compliance
- **Health advice and promotion**: including running travel clinics, smoking cessation, blood pressure checks, drug and alcohol support
- **Providing services to patients outside pharmacies**: including providing medicines advice and support in homes and care homes as well as in other health settings e.g. GP surgeries
- **Management of departments or pharmacies**: including managing budgets, operations, IT services, business planning, health and safety
- **Management of teams**: including coaching, performance management, staff supervision, other HR issues
- **Education and training**: including quality assurance, NVQ assessment, competency assessment
- **Logistics**: including procurement, contract management, project management, waste management
- **Specialist services**: including aseptics, running specialist clinics, managing blood products
- **Supporting research**: including clinical trials, audits, data collection

**Key points from the discussion included:**

- Pharmacy technicians are currently working in diverse roles across various sectors and are increasingly specialising in new areas so the groups could not identify specific duties that define the role of a pharmacy technician.
- Pharmacy technicians are taking on greater roles in providing advice and care to patients and so good communication with patients, carers and other health professionals is becoming increasingly important.
- In the past, pharmacy technicians have generally worked under fixed standard operating procedures but participants suggested they have now been given the autonomy to use their professional judgement.
- At least one group however agreed they felt more comfortable with pharmacy technicians performing roles that were governed by strict protocols & under supervision, rather than autonomous practice.
- Many of the tasks now performed by pharmacy technicians used to be performed by pharmacists.
- Participants however challenged the idea that pharmacy technicians will take over the role of pharmacists in the future, because they are aware that they have a different level of underpinning scientific knowledge and as professionals understand the limits of their knowledge and roles.
2. What tasks and skills will pharmacy technicians be known for in the future?

The main consensus across all of the groups participating in the workshops was that pharmacy technicians will in future take on a greater role in supporting patients to manage their health and well-being and particularly their medicines. There was also general agreement that pharmacy technicians will continue to have a wide range of specialist roles rather than one set role that is clearly defined.

Key points in the discussion included:

- Medicines optimisation will be at the forefront of the pharmacy technician’s role in the future - and the focus will be on supporting patients and carers to optimise their medicines rather than managing their medicines for them
- Pharmacy technicians could be known as ‘medicines advisors’ in the future and will take on more of the role of the pharmacist in relation to supporting patients with their medicines, including potentially performing MURs and suggesting changes to medicines to improve patient outcomes
- In the future, pharmacy technicians will have a greater role in working in multi-disciplinary teams and being the interface between primary and secondary care. They may for example have a caseload of patients to support when they are discharged from hospital and move back to the community
- Pharmacy technicians could have a triage role with patients in all different healthcare settings, understanding and addressing their healthcare needs and signposting them to the right healthcare professionals, working in partnership with others
- In the future pharmacy technicians working in hospitals won’t be based in the pharmacy itself - they will be in wards, in homes and working in multi-disciplinary teams
- And similarly pharmacy technicians based in the community won’t always be behind the counter doing accuracy checking - they will be out from behind the counter providing health advice and making public health interventions - e.g. offering flu vaccines.

The discussion in each workshop then moved onto how the education and training of pharmacy technicians may need to change to prepare pharmacy technicians for these future roles.

Key points in the discussion included:

- There was general consensus that the initial education and training for pharmacy technicians needs to include more on developing skills for communicating with patients
- There was debate about whether the current level of qualifications for pharmacy technicians was fit for purpose both now and in the future; some felt it was whereas others felt the qualification should be a level 4/5 (degree level)
- There were also calls for the primary qualification to provide training in both hospital and community pharmacy and for a national standard with a national examination
- Several participants argued that pharmacy technicians should be trained to be accuracy checkers from day one - otherwise you could argue they are no different from day one pharmacy support staff. Others disagreed and said pharmacy technicians should not be accuracy checkers on day one.
• A number of groups in the workshop agreed that you could retain the current level of qualifications for pharmacy technicians but then develop a framework of higher qualifications that pharmacy technicians could achieve during their careers, e.g. diplomas for those specialising in particular roles.

Next steps:

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the workshops; we greatly value your contributions which will help us in our regulatory work.

In particular, we will carefully consider your feedback as part of our ongoing discussion on the future standards of education and training for the pharmacy team, including pharmacy technicians. We would encourage everyone to visit www.pharmacyregulation.org/educationstandards to read our discussion paper and respond to our survey. We would be grateful if you could also encourage your colleagues to take part.