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INFOGRAPHIC
Eligibility Requirements for Pharm Tech Vaccine Administration
NATIONAL HEALTHCAREER ASSOCIATION

Vaccine Rollout Opens New Horizons
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Postpandemic Future Is Bright for Technicians
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Don't Miss These New Opportunities
Pharmacy Support Staff Members Are Stepping Up and Playing an Outsize Role in the Pandemic Response

By TROY TRYGSTAD, PHARMD, PHD, MBA, PHARMACY TIMES® EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

There is a new appreciation for the pharmacy profession and pharmacy professionals.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has put a spotlight on pharmacy practice. Media outlets across the country have been bursting with articles and video content featuring pharmacies serving their local communities. From specimen collections to point-of-care testing to the now megasized vaccine administration rollout, pharmacies are both busy and recognized by average Americans in a way that has never been seen before. The profession does not yet have its version of ER or Grey’s Anatomy, but, but pharmacy professionals are now viewed as essential workers by almost everyone.

NEW APPRECIATION
Community pharmacy’s pandemic response would not be possible without well-appreciated, well-organized, and well-trained support staff members. Many additional activities and functions have emerged for pharmacy technicians related to testing and vaccinations for COVID-19. These include as follows:
• additional data systems entry;
• initial counseling and interview (pharmacy “rooming” assistant);
• medical billing or revenue cycle management (nonproduct claims);
• patient monitoring immediately post vaccination;
• offsite clinic coordination and parking lot management;
• outreach for at-risk individuals; and
• utility and operation scheduling.

INCREASED DEMAND
The pandemic is transforming tens of thousands of pharmacies in ways obvious and not as they transition from a product-only model to a product-and-service model. With services comes a need for many more practitioner support staff members, particularly in a chronic care and population management model. One takeaway from primary care’s transition to the patient-centered medical home model was the need to surround physicians with the necessary support staff members to engage in value-based care delivery. As services grow in number and complexity, so does the need for program support staff members.

PHARMACIST EXTENDERS
In this light, techs are often thought of and labeled by their roles as support staff members, perhaps even extenders, under the supervision of a pharmacist service provider. Maximization of pharmacists’ skills, time, and (now emerging) billing for efficiently delivered, high-quality services becomes an exercise in optimization.

NEW ROLES WILL EMERGE
The traditional simplified roles of pharmacist, tech, and cashier will likely soon disappear. New roles and titles in multiple layers and specialized activities will emerge. One dispensing pharmacy near my home generates 71% of its profit margin from services, a feat not possible without many layers of clinical and support staff members, including many care coordination and data entry roles.

FUTURE IS BRIGHT
These new roles will use tech certification and training as a base on which to build new skills and activity ownership. There are more than 200,000 pharmacists in practice, and for community pharmacies the traditional 2:1 ratio of pharmacists to techs will become stretched as roles emerge beyond product data entry and...
Eligibility Requirements for Pharm Tech Vaccine Administration

GOAL: INCREASE ACCESS TO VACCINES

Pharm techs must be licensed and/or registered in accordance with state requirements, or be a Certified Pharmacy Technician. (if working in states without licensure or certification requirements)

Supervising Pharmacist must be readily available to assist the pharm tech as necessary.

Pharm techs must be currently certified in CPR and complete an ACPE-accredited pharm tech immunization training which includes hands-on injection technique and emergency reaction protocols.

Pharm techs must complete 2 hours of ACPE during their state licensing period.

For more info on technician vaccination training and certification contact: Stacy Abernathy, Pharmacy Relationships Manager, at 913-226-7437

Source: https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/prep-act-guidance.pdf
Vaccine Rollout Opens New Horizons
Pharmacy Technicians Should Consider Becoming Certified Immunizers to Help With This Essential Task

By NEDA DERAKHSHANIAN, CPHT, RPHT

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has been nothing short of devastating for people all around the world. As health care workers, pharmacy technicians witness hurt and pain firsthand when providing care to patients. They saw patients’ confusion and fear about the future. For some people, the pandemic may have been about missing out on fun outings, but for many others it was about survival. Many individuals were concerned about whether they would be able to get their medication refills and what would happen if a pharmacy closed or ran out of medication. Some were concerned about whether it was even safe to go to the pharmacy. Techs do their best with the resources they have to accommodate patient needs, taking pride in excellent care and transparency.

The pandemic challenged techs and other health care workers because it was difficult to know how to comfort patients. Once vaccines for COVID-19 became available, there was an increased feeling of hope.

Being knowledgeable and providing the best care to patients while complying with federal and state laws is the most important part of a tech’s job. Techs take the time to learn about the vaccines through the most reliable sources so they can provide the most accurate information to patients. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is the most reliable government source of information for all health care professionals and patients. It offers information about the effectiveness and safety of the available vaccines as well as when and where individuals can receive the vaccines.

There are 3 COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use in the US, from Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, and, most recently, Johnson & Johnson/Janssen. The vaccines were evaluated in tens of thousands of participants in clinical trials. The Moderna vaccine is administered to patients aged 18 years and older via 2 doses 28 days apart. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is administered to patients 16 years and older via 2 doses at least 21 days apart. The Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine is administered to patients 18 years and older and requires 1 dose. All 3 vaccines met the United States Food and Drug Administration’s scientific standards for effectiveness, manufacturing quality, and safety needed to support emergency use authorization.

As of March 30, 2021, there were more than 30 million total cases of COVID-19 in the United States. With the high number of cases and huge demands for vaccines, pharmacists and physicians have been overwhelmed.

In response, the US Department of Health and Human Services has passed several regulations, including one allowing qualified techs to receive training to become certified to immunize patients under the supervision of a pharmacist. With millions of Americans needing to be vaccinated to help achieve herd immunity, this was great news for techs, knowing that they could directly contribute to ending the pandemic.

Over the years, the role of techs has evolved dramatically. Years ago, techs primarily worked as cashiers or clerks, but now many states require that they hold a national certification or state license. Techs these days work directly with
Pharmacy Is Ready to Embrace Expanded Roles
Pandemic Allows Technicians to Shine and Be Increasingly Viewed as Key to Streamlining Workflow

By AMBER SUTHERS, CPHT, MSAH AND BETH BRYAN, PHARMD

There is no doubt that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has changed the dynamics in most if not all health care settings.

COVID-19 screenings, mandatory masks, and temperature checks are now common practices. One of the initial changes in pharmacy was the approval of pharmacists to order and administer COVID-19 testing following a statement on April 8, 2020, from the US Department of Health and Human Services.1 This is the first authorization of its kind for pharmacists to order and administer a test without the approval of or collaboration with a physician.

With the addition of testing in many pharmacies, changes in workflow for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians became a necessity. Even in pharmacies that were already performing other clinical services, such as flu or strep testing, the sheer demand for COVID-19 testing forced a drastic and immediate shift in daily workflow functions.

Changes in direct patient care roles included developing policies and procedures, handling paperwork, implementing patient and personal protections and testing procedures, managing the influx of phone calls, completing clinical skills training, and scheduling appointments. Previously, the daily tasks had centered around checkout, data intake, inventory, and packaging.

Techs have been ushered to the front line of serving their communities’ needs related to the pandemic. This has required additional training for chronic care intake, immunization training, and point-of-care testing. Tech workflow changes allowed for a streamlined process, from patient intake to patient interaction. Emergency regulation allowed pharmacists and techs to practice at the top of their licenses to provide much needed clinical services in the community, including COVID-19 vaccinations.2

Techs have been crucial in successful implementation of testing and increases in daily vaccinations. As the most accessible health care providers, pharmacists can use trained techs to help with testing and vaccination duties as the demand for direct clinical services has reached an all-time high. State regulations should allow techs to continue serve in these critical roles to improve overall patient health outcomes. Federal and state and federal regulations should also allow pharmacists and techs to continue to provide standard vaccines for adults and children, which are critical, particularly in underserved areas. Also, with the increase of telemedicine during COVID-19, the demand for point-of-care services has increased in the community pharmacy space. Regulations would allow these services in the community, reducing sick days and treatment time for contagious and infectious acute conditions.

The advancing role of techs seems to have had a positive impact on job satisfaction for pharmacists and techs. Patients have also been positive about the changing roles in direct patient care provided by pharmacists and techs. Personally, I have seen more gratitude from patients for our pharmacy and staff members in the past year than I had in my entire pharmacy career. Meeting the demands of COVID-19 has been not only exhausting but also extremely rewarding for my entire staff.

Professional organizations, such as the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board, have recognized the importance of the advancement of technicians over the past 2 years. Before the pandemic, the need had been met for certified technicians to complete an
World of Pharmacy Still Spins, Despite COVID-19

Technicians and Other Pharmacy Professionals Have Been Focused on the Pandemic, But Now Can Turn to What’s Next

By YVONNE FAIRBANKS, RPHT, CPHT, CSPT

The year 2021 is about changing the ways we care for patients through innovative technology.

The world of pharmacy has remained steadfast, with escalating drug costs, the seemingly never-ending opioid crisis, and workforce issues.

Pharmacy professionals are continuously working to reduce medical expenses and increase provider access through health care reform. However, drug shortages continue to drive medication costs up, which results in reduced medication adherence. The end of 2019 brought the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and forced the pharmaceutical industry to find common ground in 2020. A new normal is beginning to blossom from the struggles of 2020, and 2021 will be about figuring out how best to navigate this challenging new era of pharmacy.

Several new drugs were developed and existing drugs were reevaluated during the COVID-19 pandemic to try to halt the spread of disease. These developments have created ample opportunities for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to take part in hundreds of clinical trials and participate in mass vaccination clinics. To date, there are more than 500 clinical trials of antivirals, convalescent plasma, stem cell therapy, and vaccines. Community and hospital pharmacy staff members have been called upon to step up and help vaccinate patients by developing protocols and new workflows that will maintain their operational needs while adjusting to the public health emergency. Many community pharmacists are required to maintain certification and training to administer immunizations. However, only a handful of states allow techs to do so. Idaho, Michigan, Nevada,
Rhode Island, Utah, and Washington state are carving the way for techs to take on more hands-on clinical roles. The US Department of Health and Human Services has released guidance to allow qualified techs to administer COVID-19 vaccines during the public health emergency. The pandemic has created new advancement opportunities for techs to expand their knowledge and skills and help make a significant contribution to ending this worldwide threat. Techs are needed to travel to locations where the virus has spread and taken out the local workforce so patients can still receive the care they need from their local medical facilities. Techs can help set up and monitor vaccine clinics while becoming frontline immunizers.

Thus far, 2021 has brought on more cause for concern and vulnerability in the geriatric population regarding the adherence of medications as well as the ease of accessibility. Advanced age (≥ 60) in conjunction with diminishing physiological functions and underlying health conditions have been deemed major risk factors for the development of severe COVID-19 infection. To minimize potential exposure, many ambulatory pharmacies have begun to implement home delivery and curbside pickup of medications. This is especially helpful in the case of patients who are immunocompromised. Decreasing medication adherence, coupled with the rise of drug costs and limited access to pharmacies, continue to be an issue within the elderly population, which in turn leads to significant and unwanted consequences. To combat adherence issues, numerous hospitals use techs to perform full medication reconciliation rounds on high-risk admitted patients, such as the geriatric population, while pharmacists counsel on prescribed medications and then follow up. In addition, some pharmacists and techs can work remotely to continue to develop rapport with patients.

The pandemic has brought on several anxieties and obstacles. One is burnout. Health care workers across the country have had to continue with work duties despite the increased potential for disease exposure. In 2020, 61.2% of pharmacists reported experiencing burnout. Because of the pandemic, pharmacy personnel are experiencing declining performance metrics, an increased workload, and tighter time constraints, in conjunction with a lack of control. The simple act of having to don personal protective equipment to walk the hospital floors can wreak havoc on an individual’s psyche. That, in turn, leads to an abundance of personal stress that can trickle out and affect others in the workplace. It is in times like these that leadership should be encouraging employees to work on projects, rather than focus on clinical work, facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration, and having workplace resources to assist with work-life balance. Several health systems have implemented wellness teams from which employees can seek help when they are feeling overwhelmed; join a group that focuses on individual wellness, such as a walking group; or practice meditation and mindfulness.

This year will be one of change, growth, and perseverance. We are living through a worldwide health crisis we have not seen the likes of since the 1918 influenza pandemic. The year 2021 is about changing the ways we care for patients through innovative technology. It is a year of learning new skills that contribute to personal growth and make us more valuable to society. It is a year of tenacity and hope that this, too, shall pass, and that the world of pharmacy will demonstrate its contributions and show that it has only just begun to shine.

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A silver lining can be found in every cloud, according to the proverbial phrase. Although the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic can hardly be called a mere cloud, it has opened up opportunities in the pharmacy profession that are likely to continue even after the pandemic has abated. Techs have become an integral part of the COVID-19 vaccination effort. Prior to the pandemic, techs were not relied upon frequently as vaccine immunizers. However, once the US Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) expanded the roles of techs to administer vaccines to the public,¹ a previously untapped source of health care labor capital was unleashed. With it came the potential for more efficient distribution of vaccinations and greater visibility for pharmacy personnel. Programs that train techs to administer vaccines have demonstrated positive outcomes. In Idaho, 300 techs were trained, 25,000 vaccines were administered, and no adverse events have been reported to the state board.²

The recently amended Public Readiness Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act demonstrates how states could adopt similar legislation for techs even after HHS suspends related public health emergency declarations.¹ Coinciding with the pandemic but also with other factors, various states have initiated bills expanding the scope of practice for techs to maximize efficiency without compromising patient safety. There is a movement to examine pharmacist-to-tech ratios, and economic and legal reviews have indicated this to be beneficial.³

Pharmacy practice in the United States has been evolving toward patient-centered care to fulfill shortcomings that the biomedical model alone cannot address, such as difficulty navigating the complex health care system, health disparities across various patient groups, holes in the safety net, insufficient social support, and marginal health literacy. After years of relatively sparse attention, techs have become the focal point of a large number of studies published in high-impact, peer-reviewed journals. McKeirnan et al gathered patient perceptions on receiving immunizations from techs and found that those patients thought the process was convenient and safe, showing no hesitancy in receiving future services or recommending these services to family and friends.⁴ Wheeler et al argued the need for a capable tech workforce to support the roles of pharmacists, making note that pharmacists practice at the top of their licenses not when more is added to their plates but when they can design their practices by delegating duties to techs as they see fit.⁵ This was further underscored in a study that highlighted the effectiveness of the optimizing care model, which proposes a workflow redesign that transcends tech-check-tech.⁶ In this study, pharmacies using the model had implemented a greater number of new value-added services while expanding existing ones, all with greater work satisfaction by pharmacists and techs, as well as high praise from district and regional managers.⁷ The National Association of Chain
Drug Stores touts this model as a way forward and points to several states having accommodated practice change regulations in light of this model and other evidence.\textsuperscript{7} This follows other study results showing that techs have demonstrated effectiveness and safety in a variety of tasks, such as tech–check-tech and gathering medication histories from patients in hospital settings.\textsuperscript{8,9}

A recent study conducted an economic evaluation of advanced tech responsibilities.\textsuperscript{10} Results showed that increasing the skill set of techs helps reduce pharmacy operations costs—and not at the expense of pharmacists’ jobs. The study recognized, however, that more must be done to standardize technician education and training and to recognize value in certification in partnership with experiential and on-the-job activities, along with a commensurate increase in techs’ wages. These findings are commensurate with those from other recent studies.\textsuperscript{11}

Sparkman et al observed generally favorable attitudes among pharmacists in promoting tech roles in medication-dispensing support, product verification, and various nonclinical tasks to assist pharmacists with medication therapy management (MTM).\textsuperscript{12} Investing in the development and growth of techs may lead to a new source of leadership and managerial personnel for the profession. Furthermore, it is important to keep the goodwill that increased the scope of practice that techs gained during the pandemic through the PREP Act. Techs are increasingly trusted members of the pharmacy team. Pharmacists rely on techs to assist with pharmacy operations, and community pharmacists have referred to techs as the “face” of the pharmacy because they often interact frequently with patients, helping develop customer loyalty.\textsuperscript{13} In a study by McKeirnan et al, patients’ positive relationships with pharmacy staff members increased their comfort, confidence, and trust in immunizations administered by techs, and this translated to more positive feelings about pharmacies as an appropriate venue to receive health care beyond the receipt of prescription medications.\textsuperscript{4}

The trust built by techs with patients is paramount. The American Society of Health-System Foundation Pharmacy Forecast 2021 discusses increases in access to health care in areas where techs have greater involvement.\textsuperscript{14} Techs can work with patients to resolve access barriers to medications and services, as in the case of logistical components with MTM as well as other programs, such as manufacturer-sponsored patient assistance. A recent report in the *Annals of Pharmacotherapy* indicated the importance of techs in the rising use of telepharmacy, which was predicted even prior to the onset of the pandemic.\textsuperscript{15} Pharmacy leaders should assess how expanding techs’ scope of practice will benefit the profession and the patients it serves. A consensus on adequate education and infrastructure needs, in addition to proper workflow planning, will be necessary to gain coveted roles as health educators and more formal recognition as health providers to acquire payment for cognitive services.\textsuperscript{16}

The silver lining in an otherwise bleak and horrific pandemic may be the opportunity to clearly denote pharmacy as a venue for patients to obtain public health services and important health information. As the profession continues to evolve, techs must diversify their repertoire to include greater knowledge of behavioral and social aspects of care, in addition to skills in oral and written communication and leadership. This will be aided by renewed commitment from boards of pharmacy, education providers, and employers. The pandemic has set the profession on a certain path toward better recognition and better care for patients, and there is no turning back.

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10. Banks VL, Barras M, Snoswell CL. Economic benefits of pharmacy tech-
putting pills into bottles. Demand for certified techs and other support staff members should grow substantially over the next decade. And thank goodness. As a 20-year floater in the pharmacy profession, nothing helps my job more than having a capable staff that is ready to help me throughout the day.

REFERENCES

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insurance companies and patients and communicate with physicians and other pharmacy professionals. From managing inventory to performing reconciliations or resolving insurance issues, the role that techs play continues to expand. Techs work in various pharmacy specialty settings in the community and at hospitals, carrying more responsibility with increased compensation.

Playing a role in vaccinating patients during the pandemic is a huge step, and there are various programs available to help techs become certified. The specific training program I attended was hosted by the California Pharmacists Association. It consisted of an online self-study component and a virtual seminar via Zoom that taught me and other techs hands-on immunization techniques. We then had the opportunity to practice immunizing a partner in adherence to COVID-19 guidelines. Upon completion of the program, a final exam was administered, and those who passed received a certificate. The program provided a total of 6 hours of continuing education.

Other requirements for techs to be able to immunize under the supervision of a pharmacist may include having a valid CPR license and completing bloodborne pathogens and other potentially infectious materials training, most likely offered by the employer.

The pandemic has shown that techs can be an asset in providing proper patient care. This is certainly a step in the right direction, not only to provide more job opportunities and growth for techs, but also to engender respect from patients and other health care workers. With so many programs available in different states to help techs become immunizers, it would benefit pharmacies greatly for all techs to become certified immunizers. Taking this step would provide even greater opportunities for techs, even after the pandemic is over, and every tech should consider taking advantage of this amazing opportunity.

REFERENCES

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advanced certified pharmacy technician program to differentiate skill levels among techs.

The pandemic has further propelled the view that techs are a vital force that keeps pharmacy workflow streamlined while pharmacists provide clinical services and prescriptions. These additional skills will continue advancing the profession, requiring higher levels of education to fill the role of an advanced tech, and salary increases to reflect the skill level needed to complete the demanding tasks required. For these reasons, the profession not only needs advanced trained techs but also is ready to embrace them in advanced clinical roles. The future looks exciting for pharmacists and techs as the world continues navigating the challenges of the pandemic, as well as the need for continuing and extended clinical services outside COVID-19.

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