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**Pharmacy Technician – A Closer Look**

**By Kevin Erickson**

In the not so distant past when you walked into a pharmacy needing to get a prescription filled you would have, in most instances, found that your prescription was actually filled by the on duty pharmacists. However, over the past few years a change has occurred in the pharmacist arena and that change is, "a pharmacist probably no longer filling your prescriptions". Although pharmacists are on duty wherever medications are dispensed; today in most instances, a pharmacy technician or pharmacy assistant are the ones filling prescriptions.

Pharmacy Technicians and assistants have existed for some time but their roles have evolved for a variety of reasons.

A big reason is that they help to reduce health care costs because they get paid much less than a certified pharmacist. Another important reason is that it simply makes sense. Pharmacy technicians and assistants are trained to handle routine work (fill prescriptions and customer service), which frees up the pharmacists to focus more of their time on supervisory duties, as well as patient care.

Melissa Murer, Executive Director of the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board, put it this way, "Pharmacists are becoming more focused on patient care, so pharmacy technicians are needed to perform more of the distributive functions."

In this brief (but hopefully informative article) I attempt to demonstrate what pharmacy technician and assistants do and where they do it.

In general, they assist licensed pharmacists in providing medication and health care to patients by preparing and filling prescriptions and performing clerical tasks. Duties are similar but pharmacy technicians generally have more responsibilities. In addition, technicians and assistants are required to be closely supervised by a licensed pharmacist, although the laws defining what "being supervised" entails, varies by state.

In addition to having all of their prescriptions checked by a pharmacist, technicians and assistants must also direct all patient questions regarding drug information, health matters or prescriptions to the

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pharmacist.

### Pharmacy Technicians

Technicians follow specific procedures when filling prescriptions. After receiving an initial prescription or refill request, they must verify that the prescription information is accurate and then count, pour, retrieve, weigh, measure and if necessary, mix the required medication for the prescription. The next step is to prepare and affix the labels to the proper container. After filling the prescription the technician will then price and file it. Another important aspect of a technician's job is to prepare patient insurance forms and establish and maintain patient profiles.

In retail pharmacies, technicians will also stock and take inventory of medications (both prescription and over-the-counter) maintain equipment and help manage the till.

In many hospitals, technicians have the responsibility to read the doctors orders from a patients' chart, prepare and then deliver the medication after it's been checked by a pharmacist. They may also enter information about patients' medical records (regarding their medications) or put together a supply (normally 24 hours) of medicine for patients, including the labeling and packaging of each dose. But just like technicians working in a retail pharmacy, each package is checked by the supervising pharmacist before being given to a patient and they also maintain inventories of medicine and other supplies.

### Pharmacy Assistants

Duties are similar to pharmacy technicians and while hospitals and pharmacies employ pharmacy assistants, the number of available positions is generally less than technicians. In retail pharmacies they work as clerks or cashiers, answer phones, handle money and perform clerical duties. In hospitals they also deliver medications and assist in stocking shelves.

Pharmacy technicians and assistants work in clean well-organized areas but are required to spend most of their workday on their feet. And because more and more pharmacies are open 24-hours a day work hours can vary with technicians and assistants are often required to work odds hours (nights, evenings and weekends). Therefore, there are many opportunities to work part-time in 24-hour pharmacies. In addition, a percentage of both technicians and assistants work part time because they are studying to become pharmacists.

States have traditionally required a one-to-one ratio of pharmacist to technician but that is also expected to change. Mark Boesen, Director of Government and Student Affairs for the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, has stated that: "Many of the major employers of technicians are expanding the number of their facilities and boards of pharmacy in some States are allowing the legal ratio of technicians to pharmacists to expand. This is a very promising field to work in."

An increasing demand for technicians with greater responsibility has prompted some States to revise their one-to-one ratio of pharmacist to technician to two or three technicians per pharmacist.

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As pharmacy technicians take on more and more tasks previously performed by pharmacists, they must also learn and master new technology. A good example is the increased use (by many pharmacies) of robotic machines to dispense medicines. Technicians will be required to oversee the machine, stock bins and label containers.

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### **Pharmacy Schools – The Short List**

#### **By Kevin Erickson**

>From pharmacy technician programs to popular nursing school and legal assistant programs, universities nationwide are gearing up to accommodate the current demand for various health care and legal related programs. As for aspiring pharmacists, there's plenty of quality pharmacy schools they can choose from when it comes to pursuing their education.

I've briefly outlined a few of the more popular Pharmacy Schools below. Some provide only traditional campus training, others provide only online training while others provide both.

University of Phoenix Online For those who actually prefer a pharmacy program that is convenient and designed around their schedule you may want to check out the University of Phoenix. The University of Phoenix online caters to students like you who don't have the time to attend a traditional pharmacy school.

The University of Phoenix online pharmacy school has the largest number of accredited online pharmacy degree programs when compared to other online pharmacy schools. The University of Phoenix was founded in 1976 and was one of the very first accredited universities to offer online college education with corresponding complete degree programs through the convenience of the internet. Many of their students are finishing their course work in as little as 2 to 3 years. The University of Phoenix online, is not just a pharmacy school, it actually offers a number of other health care related programs like healthcare management (masters and bachelor's), health information and nursing.

Bryman College Located throughout California is Bryman College, a pharmacy school which also

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offers various certificate programs in the following health care fields: Massage Therapy, Medical Assistant, Pharmacy Technician, Dental Assisting as well as Medical Billing & Coding.

Capella Online University Like the University of Phoenix online pharmacy school, Capella Online University is also an accredited online pharmacy school which is specifically designed to provide high quality education for busy people who don't have the time to attend classes at regular pharmacy schools but who want to pursue a career in health care at their own pace and schedule.

This pharmacy school is actually built on a community of determined and highly motivated adult learners as well as reputable faculty members. The staff is geared towards helping you become successful with your chosen health care career. Capella University online programs include healthcare management for bachelor's, masters and PhDs.

Florida Metropolitan University While the Florida Metropolitan University has locations throughout the state of Florida and offers programs in various in-demand health care professions. However, it's not just a pharmacy school but a well-rounded university that is geared towards being up-to-date with what the job market is currently looking for in job candidates.

>From the fields of business, criminal justice, computers, health care, legal and management, design and marketing, Florida Metropolitan University also boasts of offering in-demand health care programs like: EKG Technician, Healthcare Management, Laboratory Technician, Administration (in the medical office), Medical Assistant, Massage Therapy, Phlebotomy, Medical Transcription, Pharmacy

Technician/Assistant as well as Surgical Technician.

Lincoln Technical Institute The Lincoln Technical Institute prides itself on providing their students with hands-on training to improve their acquired skills in the Health Care and Medical profession but also in Automotive, Drafting, Computers and Information Technology and Electronics. Their pharmacy school offers a Pharmacy Assistant/Technician program.

DeVry University DeVry takes great lengths in providing their students with highly career-oriented undergraduate as well as post graduate degree programs in various fields like business and management and technology. They also provide a highly flexible learning environment to assist students earn their degrees a little faster than other universities. If you're diligent and hard-working you're sure to earn your degree in as early as three years. The university also offers students healthcare programs in various health care professions.

Georgia Medical Institute The Georgia Medical Institute provides students with a more personalized learning atmosphere and environment. Their courses and programs are specifically designed to support their students in their professional development... especially in the health care fields.

Georgia Medical Institute doesn't just have a great pharmacy school offering Pharmacy Technology but they also offer other health care related courses such as Medical Administration, Dental Assisting, Massage Therapy, Surgical Technology, Respiratory Care, Massage Therapy and Medical Assisting. In addition to offering traditional program schedules they also offer many programs in versions which

will allow the motivated student to finish their studies at a much quicker pace, if they choose to do so.

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