

PHARMASCRIP

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Presidential Perspective

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The Right Thing to Do!

One of the issues that pharmacists talk about concerns the recognition, certification, and registration of the pharmacy technician. Our newly adopted Inpatient Institutional Pharmacy Regulations actually never mention pharmacy technicians specifically. It refers instead to "ancillary personnel". Given the compromises necessary to adopt or change regulations, this shouldn't surprise us. After all, some pharmacists fear that recognition could lead to registration and/or licensure which could ultimately lead to . . . higher technician salaries? In a market-based economy, salary is often commensurate with the value that is added to the service or product (e.g., quality). Quality - meeting or exceeding customers' expectations. What could be more important in our particular industry than providing our patients with the highest quality products and services (e.g., the right drug, to the right patient, at the right time). The most successful companies treat their employees as assets to be developed, not simply as costs to be subtracted from the bottom line. I believe recognition is an important step in developing employees; let the marketplace determine salaries. (Thirty-two other states currently recognize the title pharmacy technician, have they experienced salary inflation?)

There are those who will argue that certification will not guarantee quality. "Those questions on the certification exam really have no relevance to what our technicians do." Does passing the pharmacy board exam guarantee the quality of the work pharmacists perform? If no laws existed which required pharmacists to pass a board exam, who would you rather see hired, or have to work along side, or follow on the next shift? What is important is establishing some minimum level of knowledge and assuring that the individuals we employ, and in whom we trust to assist in the provision of drug products for our patients, demonstrate the attainment of this minimum standard.

It has been said that robotics and automation will eliminate the need for pharmacy anyway, so why worry about them. I don't think so. All industries are being faced with downsizing and re-engineering through robotics and automation, but this has not lessened the need for better prepared workers who can perform technical jobs more efficiency and effectively. Technicians will be with us for the foreseeable future. Knowledgeable technicians can provide crucial feedback and input that is needed to improve our processes. Successful companies know that Quality the first time is less expensive than re-work and/or errors (wrong drug, no drug, wrong patient, etc.).

What about the registration of technicians? Currently 8 states require registration and 3 states require licensure. Wouldn't you like to know that the technician you are about to hire has a positive employment track record? Centralized registration could help track the good apples (as well as the bad). When performance is of concern in your workplace, wouldn't you like to know that additional external incentives exist for the technician to perform according to standards. (By the way, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy operates a clearinghouse for Pharmacy technicians. This clearinghouse permits states to share registration and disciplinary information on Pharmacy technicians; participation is currently voluntary).

Would changes in the technician arena just make us another "lemming" about to follow the herd, or is Maryland "behind the curve"? The MD Board of Pharmacy is currently proposing revisions to our Practice Act. Pharmacists in Maryland will soon have an opportunity to respond to the proposals. Don't forget about the value of the technician when you are asked to submit comments. Just as high-striving for excellence, we as health systems Pharmacists need to continually raise the "bar". Encourage your technicians to study for, and take the certification exam. Those who pass will take great pride in their accomplishment and have a positive effect on their peers. Certification and registration of pharmacy technicians is the right thing to do!

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