



“Close-Up on Complaints” presents errors that occur when providing patient care so that practitioners can use them as learning opportunities. Ideally, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians will be able to identify areas of potential concern within their own practice, and plan and implement measures to help avoid similar incidents from occurring in the future.

## PHARMACY TECHNICIANS – PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

### SUMMARY OF THE INCIDENTS

This Close Up on Complaints will outline two incidents related to a pharmacy technician’s professional responsibilities and Standards of Practice.

These incidents were similar in nature with the patients’ compliance aids being dispensed with an incorrect medication, incorrect dosing frequency of a medication, or a missing medication. In both cases, the pharmacy technician was responsible for completing and signing off on the technical check of the compliance aid and ensuring that the medications were not released to the patient prior to the pharmacist completing a therapeutic check.

In the first incident, a patient had been prescribed a pain medication that was not included in the compliance aid batch after the first month’s fill. The patient’s stool softener was also dispensed with the wrong dosing frequency. The patient discovered the error during a trip to the emergency department after feeling extremely sick. The patient then had to return

to her physician for a follow up assessment prior to restarting her pain medication.

In the second incident, the patient was dispensed another patient’s compliance aid and, prior to being alerted to the mistake by the pharmacy, she ingested medications not prescribed for her including diuretics, antidepressants and warfarin. The patient required follow-up with her family physician to monitor for adverse outcomes due to the mistake.

### WHY DID THIS HAPPEN?

The incidents described above occurred because each of the pharmacy technicians were not clear regarding their professional responsibilities related to their scope of practice and did not meet the Standards of Practice

for dispensing medications, collaboration, safety and quality, and professionalism.

For all prescriptions they process, the pharmacy technician is required to reconcile that the technical aspects of a prescription match the medication dispensed to the patient, communicate any problems out of their scope or beyond their personal competence to the pharmacist, appropriately document on the patient record, and confirm that the pharmacist has completed a therapeutic review prior to releasing the medication to the patient.

### COMPLAINT OUTCOME

The College’s Inquiries, Complaints & Reports Committee (ICRC) oversees investigations of each complaint the College receives. The Committee considers a practitioner’s conduct,

### Have a Complaint?

Anyone who is not satisfied with the care of services provided by a pharmacy, pharmacist, pharmacy technician, student or intern can file a formal complaint with the College. Complaints must be received in writing and include as much detail as possible. The College investigates all written complaints.



competence and capacity by assessing the facts of each case, reviewing submissions from both the complainant and the practitioner, and evaluating the available records and documents related to the case.

In both of these cases, the Committee found that the pharmacy technician was professionally responsible for the incident. The Committee noted that practitioners must be very aware of their scope of practice and these pharmacy technicians should have more closely followed the Standards of Practice, such as ensuring that the prescription was technically accurate and that the pharmacist completed a therapeutic check prior to releasing the medication to the patient.

The Committee issued advice and recommendations to assist the technicians in meeting their responsibilities and provided them with insights and opportunities to improve practice and mitigate the risk of similar occurrences in the future.

### LEARNING FOR PRACTITIONERS

As regulated healthcare professionals, pharmacy technicians are accountable and responsible for the technical aspects of both new and refill prescriptions, such as the correct patient, medication, dosage form, route of administration, strength, physician etc. When a pharmacy technician assesses a prescription for technical accuracy, he or she is accountable, and liable, for the technical accurateness of the medication released to the patient. In such cases, the pharmacist would also be required and accountable to review the prescription but would only review for the therapeutic appropriateness of the prescribed medication for that specific patient.

For example, if a pharmacy technician, while filling a prescription, dispensed the wrong dose, this would be a technical error and the pharmacy technician would be accountable for it. If, however, the dose was filled accurately by the technician but the dose was therapeutically inappropriate for the patient, it should have been discovered during the therapeutic check, which is the pharmacist's responsibility.

Each completed prescription must contain the signature, or some other identifying mechanism, of both the technician (for the technical functions) and the pharmacist (for the therapeutic functions). Pharmacy technicians must be aware that the pharmacist can complete a therapeutic check at any time during the process and, where a pharmacy technician has completed a technical check, is not required to review the physical medication or prescription in order to appropriately conduct this check. Therefore, although




[Integrating Pharmacy Technicians into Community Practice](#) explores ways to integrate these highly trained professionals, working to their full scope of practice, into the workflow of a community pharmacy.

an independent double technical check is best practice, a pharmacy technician cannot rely on the pharmacist to catch technical errors after an initial technical check has been completed.

Prior to releasing a new or refill medication to a patient, it is the responsibility of the pharmacy technician to ensure that the prescription has been reviewed for therapeutic appropriateness by a pharmacist. This requires that pharmacy technicians collaborate and notify the pharmacist where issues arise using applicable policies and procedures and effective communication.

As a professional, a pharmacy technician must accept responsibility for their actions and decisions. Where an error or issue occurs, it is the responsibility of a pharmacy technician to respond to the safety risk by collaborating in documentation and review of the error in order to develop policies and procedures to minimize future events and promote patient safety.

Integrating a registered pharmacy technician into practice offers a viable solution to improve pharmacy workflow and patient care, particularly when maximizing the technician's scope. In order to do this, however, pharmacy professionals must clearly understand what a pharmacy technician can do under their own authority as a regulated healthcare professional and the expectations placed on pharmacy technicians in practice. 

### ADVICE/RECOMMENDATION

Advice/recommendations allow an opportunity for practitioners to improve conduct or care.

Advice/Recommendation is issued as a remedial measure for matters which are not serious in nature and are considered to pose low risk of harm to the public.