

Why Does Certification Matter?

CHAPTER

1



OBJECTIVES/TOPICS TO COVER:

- ✓ Describe the differences between certification, registration, and licensure.
- ✓ List the benefits of pharmacy technician certification.

WHY DOES CERTIFICATION MATTER?

Our country spends more than \$177 billion annually on medication errors. Approximately 7000 people lose their lives annually because of prescription errors in the United States.

Studies and statistics show that certified pharmacy technicians are an essential component in reducing medication errors.

1. Certification proves a level of knowledge that the pharmacy technician has obtained.
2. Certification is critical to patient safety. In gaining a standardized level of knowledge, the pharmacy technician will have a broader knowledge base and hence reduce the likelihood of potential medication errors.
3. Certification is a positive step toward demonstrating the professionalism of pharmacy technicians.

On a more personal level, gaining national pharmacy technician certification is a big deal! Certification matters to you, because becoming certified will help you in your employment either to be eligible for a job or to get a promotion.

Certification matters to the employer for a number of reasons.

1. Certification may be required by the State Board of Pharmacy.
2. Certification is thought to be a tool used in selecting more qualified personnel.
3. Employing qualified, competent pharmacy technicians will help ensure medication safety.

Obtaining national certification demonstrates commitment by you, the pharmacy technician. The commitment between you and your employer will increase job satisfaction and will have a positive impact on work-related tasks, thus reducing medication errors.

Every healthcare professional must perform at the highest level of his or her degree. Gaining certification is a giant step toward doing your best in your profession!

A TRUSTED PROFESSION

Pharmacists have been ranked among the most trusted professionals in the country for more than two decades. A 2010 Gallup survey found that most Americans consider pharmacists to have very high honesty and ethical standards. Two other professions came in ahead of pharmacists: nurses and military officers. Grade school teachers and medical doctors came in behind pharmacists. The public sees you, the technician, as an integral part of the pharmacy operations. The trust that the American public has in its pharmacists is conveyed to the entire pharmacy team. It's our professional obligation to achieve our highest standards. Certification helps pharmacy technicians achieve professional goals.

Something to think about: At present, pharmacy technicians perform more than 90% of the daily tasks in pharmacy settings. Yet the education that technicians receive is only about 2% of what a pharmacist receives. Doesn't it make sense to show a baseline level of knowledge for pharmacy technicians through the certification process?

CHASING ZERO

Chasing Zero: Winning the War on Healthcare Harm is a brilliant documentary that explains the intent to teach and guide healthcare professionals to strive for zero medication errors. Actor Dennis Quaid hosts and narrates the documentary.

In 2007, Quaid and his wife's newborn twins were given a massive overdose of the blood thinner heparin. Since the occurrence of this medication error at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, Quaid has been an advocate for patient safety and has helped educate the public on preventable medication errors. Quaid addressed his support for pharmacy technician certification in a letter to C. K. Manesse, CEO of the American Society of Health System Pharmacists (ASHP), on December 7, 2009. Quaid wrote, "As pharmacists continue to rely heavily on pharmacy technicians, it is vitally important to ensure that standardized minimum requirements are in place to protect the health and well being of the public."

Take a moment now to link to the documentary at <http://www.safetyleaders.org/pages/chasingZeroDocumentary.jsp>. Your next 53 minutes of watching this presentation may prove to be the most valuable motivator for you to meet your certification goals.

To link to the Toolbox: <http://www.safetyleaders.org/leadersToolbox/home.jsp>

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REGISTRATION AND CERTIFICATION?

Certification involves taking an exam to show a level of knowledge. To be certified means that you have passed a test. Registration, on the other hand, is not knowledge based. Registration is signing up with your State Board of Pharmacy. In the same manner that you register for college classes or register your vehicle, most states require pharmacy technicians to be registered. Being registered means that you are on a list of people who are authorized to practice as a pharmacy technician. States have different requirements for registration, or to get on that "list," to practice as a technician. Some states require you to be at least 18 years of age and to have a high school diploma or GED. Some states require a degree in pharmacy technology earned from an accredited college. Whatever the requirements of your state, being registered means that you have met the state's requirements to practice as a technician.

Each State Board of Pharmacy has jurisdiction over the registered pharmacy technician. Since the board has the duty to protect the general public, it is granted the power to undertake disciplinary action against a pharmacy, a pharmacist, or a pharmacy technician in the interest of protecting the public against further harm. The board has the authority to punish the registered individual for committing the wrongful act. Please keep in mind that if a pharmacy technician is *not* legally required to be registered or licensed within the state, the State Board of Pharmacy has no jurisdiction over the individual technician, but does have authority over the pharmacy.

Table 1-1 Pharmacy Regulatory Landscape

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| Mandatory Certification AZ, LA, TX, WV, WY, ID, IA, MT, NM, OR, UT, WA IL |
| Recognizes Certification (NH) Ratio (AL, ME, NC, CT, KS, MA, MN, NJ, TN, SC) Duties (KY, RI) 1 of multiple options (CA, FL, IN, OH, MD, NV, VA) |
| Voluntary AK, CO, GA, AR, DE, DC, HI, MI, MS, MO, NE, ND, OK, SD, VT |
| No Regulation (NY, PA, WI) |

Note: MS enacted a certification mandate effective April 2011.

Source: Courtesy of the National Healthcareer Association.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE LICENSED?

A pharmacist is both registered and licensed. Licensed means that the individual has met educational and testing requirements as well as other state-specific requirements to practice as a pharmacist. For example, a prospective pharmacist generally must earn a PharmD degree to obtain a license.

There are a handful of states that require pharmacy technicians to be licensed. However, the licensing procedures for technicians in these states are virtually the same as registration procedures. Alaska, Arizona, California, Massachusetts, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, and Wyoming require a technician to be licensed.

Emily's Law

Most of us have heard about the notable medication error that resulted in the death of a 2-year-old girl named Emily Jerry. Emily was given a parenteral saline solution containing 23% salt when the solution was physician ordered to be 1% salt. The wrong solution was prepared by a pharmacy technician at a Cleveland, Ohio, hospital in 2006. Since the death of his young daughter, Emily Jerry's father has advocated for training and certification for pharmacy technicians. In 2009, Ohio enacted Emily's Law, which requires certification for pharmacy technicians in Ohio. The Ohio Board of Pharmacy recognizes certification through the Institute for the Certification of Pharmacy Technicians (ICPT), the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB), or an exam created by the employer that meets the board's requirements and standards.

Government representatives proposed Emily's Act, which called for mandatory pharmacy technician certification not only in Ohio but also in every state. Emily's Act was not enacted into law.

Currently, 13 states require pharmacy technicians to be certified through either PTCB or ICPT. An additional 20 states recognize certification by adjusting pharmacy technician to pharmacist staffing ratios or by allowing additional duties to certified pharmacy technicians. Voluntary certification is mandated in 15 states. As of January 2011, only 3 states did not have regulations regarding the certification of pharmacy technicians. That 48 states now recognize the value of certification for pharmacy technicians is a dramatic increase from 1993 when only 12 states required certification, registration, licensing, or all three for pharm techs (**Table 1-1**).

RESOURCES

1. Mask A, Armstrong R, Hinchcliffe K. NC company invents device to reduce prescription mix-ups. Available at: <http://www.wral.com/lifestyles/healthteam/story/8898212/>. Accessed February 2011.

2. Jones JM. Nurses Top Honesty and Ethics List for 11th Year. Available at: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/145043/Nurses-Top-Honesty-Ethics-List-11-Year.aspx>. Accessed February 2011.
3. Sangiacomo M. Ohio governor signs “Emily’s Law” forcing standards for pharmacy technicians. Available at: http://blog.cleveland.com/metro/2009/01/emilys_law_enacted_by_gov_stri.html. Accessed January 7, 2009.
4. Emily’s Law: Ohio pharmacy technicians and their employers face new state regulations. Jones Day Publication. <http://www.jonesday.com/emilys-law-ohio-pharmacy-technicians-and-their-employers-face-new-state-regulations-09-16-2009>. Accessed February 2011.
5. Postgraduate Healthcare Education. Prescription errors and their legal consequences: Best practice for prevention. Power-Pak C.E. Available at: <http://www.powerpak.com>. Accessed February 2011.
6. Institute of Medicine. *To Err Is Human: Building a Safer Health System*. Kohn LT, Corrigan JM, Donaldson MS, eds. Washington, DC: National Academy Press; 1999:5.
7. National Healthcareer Association: Institute for the Certification of Pharmacy Technicians. Pharmacy Technician Certification (CPhT). Available at: <http://www.nhanow.com/pharmacy-technician.aspx>. Accessed February 2011.
8. *Chasing Zero: Winning the War on Healthcare Harm* [video]. Silver Spring, MD: Discover Channel/CME; 2010. Available at: <http://www.safetyleaders.org/pages/chasingZeroDocumentary.jsp>. Accessed February 2011.

TASK SHEET

TOPIC TO REVIEW: REGISTER FOR AN EXAM DATE

Materials

Pharmacy Technician Exam Review Guide
JB Test Prep: Pharmacy Technician Exam Review Guide

To Do List

- Study plan in place
- Check to see what exam my state recognizes
- Register for exam

Prepare

1. Read the section on the certification exam in the review guide.
2. Visit the exam websites: www.ptcb.org and www.icpt.org
3. Contact your state pharmacy board to find out which certification exams are approved in your state: PTCE, ExCPT, or both.
4. Decide which certification exam you will take: PTCE or ExCPT.

Study Plan

No studying at this point, but get a plan in place. How many days a week can you study? How many hours a day? What room of the house is best to study in?

Tips

After you have decided which certification test you will take, register for the exam. Follow the online registration instructions. Pick a testing date that allows you enough study time according to the study plan you have in place.

End of Chapter

Make notes here of questions you have about certification. Find out the answers by rereading the chapter, visiting the testing websites, or calling your state pharmacy board.

