



April 16, 2008

Senator Harvey S. Peeler, Jr.
Chair, Senate Medical Affairs Committee
213 Gressette Building
Columbia, S.C. 29201

Dear Senator Peeler:

On behalf of the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) and our state affiliate, the South Carolina Society of Health-System Pharmacists, we strongly urge you to vote against Senate Bill 1156 and refer it back to the Medical Affairs Subcommittee for further study. The bill proposes to amend Section 40-43-86 of the Pharmacy Practice Act and increase the pharmacy technician-to-pharmacist ratio from 3:1 (with two technicians being state certified) to 4:1 (with one technician being state certified). However, the bill has no provision that ensures adequate training of pharmacy technicians, nor is there language regarding accredited programs. Appropriate and accredited training is a necessary protection for public health and a concern that is paramount to the entire population of South Carolina.

ASHP is the 30,000-member national professional association that represents pharmacists who practice in hospitals, health maintenance organizations, ambulatory care clinics, long-term care facilities, home care, and other components of health care systems. Pharmacy technicians who work in these settings are supervised by pharmacists and assist the pharmacist in providing patient care. We encourage the appropriate use of trained pharmacy technicians by pharmacists, as they work to provide effective and individualized patient care.

In a recent survey, pharmacists who live and work in South Carolina were asked if it would be in the public interest to require that all pharmacy technicians meet a consistent standard for education and training; over 90% responded "Yes." Almost 75% of those surveyed agreed that pharmacy practice acts should require technicians to complete an *accredited* training program and attain Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB) certification prior to registration. Pharmacists noted that 'there needs to be one set of standards' and that 'it is important for the general public to know that the people behind the counter are qualified to be there.' One participant says it plainly, 'Trained and regulated pharmacy tech[nicians] are a great asset to pharmacists and patients. But without strict training and state board regulations, the public is not protected.'

Currently in South Carolina, in order to be a **registered pharmacy technician**, all that is required is \$40 and a completed Pharmacy Technician registration application. A **state certified registered pharmacy technician** must also:

- Pass the PTCB exam or a Board of Pharmacy approved exam and maintain current certification;
- Work for 1000 hours under the supervision of a licensed pharmacist as a registered pharmacy technician;
- Have a high school diploma or its equivalent; and
- Complete a formal academic training program.

As you consider Senate Bill 1156, ask yourself the question – which pharmacy technician would you want preparing your or a family member’s prescription?

The February 2008 *USA Today* series, detailing errors that occurred as a result of action on the part of an individual employed as a pharmacy technician, highlights the need to ensure adequate and standardized training for the technicians of the state of South Carolina. As we increase the number of technicians that a single pharmacist supervises, we increase the role of technicians in patient care. This affects patient safety, which makes the appropriate training of pharmacy technicians essential.

In 2004, the legislature amended the Practice Act, specifically Section 40-43-82, to allow a 3:1 technician-to-pharmacist ratio, with at least two technicians being state certified. Since then, the Board of Pharmacy has been unable to adopt regulations regarding ‘approved technician course[s] as provided by in subsection (D).’ However, the Board of Pharmacy, in its meetings and newsletters, mentions ASHP-accredited programs as meeting the requirement of a ‘...formal academic pharmacy technician training program that leads to a certificate, diploma, or higher degree [that] may be approved by the Board,’ (Sec. 40-43-82(D)).

It would be contrary to the public interest to increase the ratio to 4:1, since the legislature had established the 3:1 ratio, with two state certified pharmacy technicians, in 2004. The proposed increase in the ratio is particularly troubling as there is no provision to require completion of an accredited training program.

While the South Carolina Board of Pharmacy has given tacit approval to accredited training programs, there has not been a strong statement in support of protecting the public health on this front. Increased public safety and reduced medication errors would be achieved with an appropriately educated, trained, and certified pharmacy technician staff.

As you deliberate this issue, we encourage you to put patients first and support accredited training and certification for the pharmacy technicians who serve the citizens of South Carolina. Your support for that approach would be consistent with what the pharmacists

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of South Carolina – the health professionals who have ultimate responsibility for the safety of medication dispensing and distribution – believe should be done. An essential step in this direction is to defeat Senate Bill 1156 and refer it back to the Medical Affairs Subcommittee for additional study. Feel free to contact me (301-664-8698) should you have any additional questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian M. Meyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Brian M. Meyer
Director, Government Affairs Division

cc: Senator Ronnie W. Cromer
Fred Bender, President, South Carolina Society of Health-System Pharmacists
Robert L. Spires, Immediate Past President, South Carolina Society of Health-System Pharmacists

Enclosures: Summary of South Carolina Pharmacist Survey
South Carolina Pharmacist Survey Results