Technician Initiatives and Development: Moving Beyond New Roles to Leadership

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Learning Objectives

• Analyze case management studies business models to support advanced roles for pharmacy technicians.
• Evaluate resources for pharmacy technician development models that support pharmacy services in various care settings.
• Assess strategic planning considerations for technician workforce and future roles pharmacy leaders should consider for advancement of technicians.
### Technician Job Descriptions

**Basic Technician**
- Unit Dose
- Automation
- Sterile Products
- Chemo
- Delivery

**Advanced Technician**
- Controlled Substances
- Diversion
- Supervisors/Managers
- Tech-Check-Tech
- Medication History

### Market and Trends

**Pharmacy Technicians**
- 402,500 jobs in 2016

**Technician Employers**
- 52% Retail
- 16% Hospital
- 10% General merchandise
- 8% Food and Beverage

**Job Outlook, 2016-26**
- 12% (faster than average)

**Employment Change**
- 47,600 additional jobs from 2016-2026

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Registration Requirements

- High School Diploma or GED
  - All states
- Certification
  - Varies by state
  - Varies by employer
- Accredited Training Program
  - Varies by state
  - Varies by employer

Education/Certification

- Recognized Certifications
  - The Pharmacy Technician Certification Board
  - National Healthcareer Association
  - Specialty Certifications
    - Sterile Products
- ASHP Accredited Training Programs
  - Standardized criteria
- College Training Programs
  - 6 month – 1 year certificate or diploma
  - Two-year associate degree in pharmacy technology
  - Bachelors of Science in Pharmaceutical Sciences
- On-Line Programs
- On the Job Training

Salaries

- Annual wages for Pharmacy Technicians
  - Hospitals; state, local, and private $36,710
  - General merchandise stores $31,320
  - Food and beverage stores $29,860
  - Pharmacies and drug stores $29,500


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Annual Salary Comparison May 2017

Opportunities

- **Standardize Education/Certification**
  - Increase responsibilities
- **Pharmacy Technician Career versus job**
  - Create opportunities for advancement
  - Retention
- **Advance Pharmacy and Pharmacist services**

Barriers

- Market demand growing faster than technicians entering the job market
- Non-standardized registration requirements
- Non-standardized technician allowed duties
- Non-standardize formal training and certification
- Wages
- Culture
KEY TAKEAWAYS

1) STANDARD TECHNICIAN TRAINING IS ESSENTIAL TO DEFINE AND EXPAND THE ROLE OF THE PHARMACY TECHNICIAN
2) PHARMACY TECHNICIANS NEED TO BE KNOWN AS A KEY COMPONENT OF THE PHARMACY TEAM
3) ADVANCING THE ROLE OF THE PHARMACY TECHNICIAN WILL ADVANCE THE ROLE OF THE PHARMACIST

References

1. Bureau of Labor and Statistics
   https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/pharmacy-technicians.htm


Technician Career Ladder Optimization and Leadership Development

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Objectives

Describe efforts to optimize an existing technician career ladder to better suit the needs of the department and workforce.

Discuss strategies to elevate technicians outside of the career ladder and to develop leadership skills.

Audience Poll

Do you have an established career ladder for technicians at your organization?
Audience Poll
How many different levels are built into your technician career ladder?

- 2
- 3
- 4
- > 4

Audience Poll
Do you feel your career ladder accomplishes what it is intended to?

Where Are We Going?

- Increased focus on professionalizing technician roles
  - Efforts to develop uniform national standards for entry-level technicians
- Leadership development is needed
  - Technicians supervise other technicians in 1/3 of hospitals

In 75% of health systems, entry-level pharmacy technicians will be supervised by senior pharmacy technicians.
Where Are We Going?

In your department’s strategic plan, give priority to achieving a high level of professionalization, job satisfaction, and career commitment of technician staff.

Recognize that this will probably require a formal career ladder that specifies how technicians can advance in their responsibilities and compensation.

Site Background

- Pharmacy Enterprise
  - 430 Employees
    - 164 Technicians
  - 20 Locations
  - 7 Divisions
- Technician Career Ladder in place since 2005
- Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB) Certification Required

Existing Career Ladder Overview
Advancement Requirements

- General Requirements
  - Advancement requests were evaluated any time during the year
  - Technicians could not advance more than once per 12 months
- Human Resource Requirements
  - No written corrective action within previous 12 months
  - At supervisor’s discretion if employee had verbal counseling within previous 90 days
- Competency Requirements
  - Area specific competencies
- Employee Transfers
  - If transferring to a new area – all competencies must be completed within 6 months to maintain current level

Existing Career Ladder Challenges

- Lack of Longevity
- Task vs. Performance Driven
- Training Availability
- Differing Timeline
- Differing Competencies
- Inconsistencies Between Sites
- Employee Migration
- No Reward for Star Performers

Career Ladder Redesign

- Process
  - Owner/Facilitator
    - PGY2 HSPA Resident
  - Stakeholders
    - Technician leadership
    - Senior department leadership
  - Timeline
    - 10 months
- Recommendations
  - Add an additional rung to the ladder
  - Make advancement about performance in addition to competencies
  - Objectify the subjective
Redesigned Career Ladder

Tech Trainee
- Entry Level
- PTCB within 6 mos.

Tech I
- Active PTCB
- Employed 6 mos. as Tech Trainee
- New hires in certain circumstances
- Basic competencies

Tech II
- Tech I Req.
- Employed 12 mos. as Tech II
- Advanced competencies

Tech III
- Tech II Req.
- Employed 12 mos. as Tech II
- Professional involvement

Technician Coordinator/Supervisor
- Remained Unchanged

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New Advancement Process

Technician submits application for advancement to supervisor

Supervisor reviews application for completeness

Supervisor reviews employee file for any corrective action

Application is de-identified and submitted for review by committee

Committee reviews application and makes decision

Decisions communicated to employee directly or through supervisor

New Advancement Process

Advancement Application
- Application and Self Assessment
  - 7 questions
- Resume
- Applicable competencies and performance metrics
- Peer feedback from annual evaluation (provided by supervisor)

Career Advancement Committee
- Meets bi-annually
- Facilitated by a department supervisor
- Consists of front line technicians from each division are appointed by supervisors
- Committee reviews applications and grants final decisions
- Committee reviews policy annually
TUKHS Technician Data

- First Career Advancement Committee held in May 2018
  - 18 Applications
  - 7 Approved
- Lessons Learned
  - More emphasis needs placed on application questions
  - Plan to provide examples of good applications
  - Need to set a time limit to discuss each application

Continued Challenges

- Comparing technicians across different sites is still difficult
- Importance of professional involvement vs amount worked
  - Should filling open shifts carry the same weight as professional involvement?
  - Financial barriers?
- Narrowing of pay differences between rungs of the ladder

Objectives

Describe efforts to optimize an existing technician career ladder to better suit the needs of the department and workforce

Discuss strategies to elevate technicians outside of the career ladder and to develop leadership skills
Life Beyond the Ladder

Excellent Employee ≠ Strong Leader

Technician Leadership Development

People

Training & Education

Clear Expectations & Support

Lean Principles & Coaching Kata

• Encourage technicians to take ownership of their career path – what are their goals?
• Involve front-line technicians with leadership potential in department projects/meetings
• Assign small projects as "trial" to evaluate skills necessary in leadership positions
Technician Leadership Development

Training & Education
- Identify and address knowledge deficits
- Internal leadership development series
- Excel courses
- Audit courses through university
- Topic discussions
- Journal clubs
- Encourage involvement in professional organizations

Clear Expectations & Support
- Establish ownership of their new role
- Short-term vs long-term involvement
- High touch initially and with new situations
- Gradually allow for more independence as confidence and skill sets grow
- Provide real-time feedback

Lean Principles & “Coaching Kata”
- Daily and Weekly Status Reports
- “Kata”—practiced, patterned movements
- 5 Questions:
  - Target condition
  - Actual condition
  - Obstacles
  - Next steps
  - Lessons learned
KEY TAKEAWAYS

1) CAREER LADDERS CAN BE UTILIZED TO PROVIDE STRUCTURED CAREER ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TECHNICIANS

2) CAREER LADDERS SHOULD BE EVALUATED AND ADJUSTED PERIODICALLY TO ENSURE THEY ARE MEETING THE INTENDED GOALS

3) FOCUSED EFFORTS ARE NEEDED TO DEVELOP TECHNICIAN LEADERSHIP SKILLS BEFORE AND AFTER TRANSITIONING INTO A LEADERSHIP ROLE

References


Objectives

Define “career ladder” and “career lattice” and the potential application and approach in health-systems.

Develop an understanding of the potential barriers in establishing a formalized career ladder.

Discuss strategies to elevate technicians along a “career path,” in the absence of a “career ladder” and to develop leadership skills.

Audience Poll

Raise your hand if you believe this statement to be correct?

“Career ladder is a metaphor for job promotion.”
Career Ladder

- Method of talent development and retention
- Series of steps or a progression within a job classification with increasing pay, skill, responsibility, or authority
- Designed to encourage and assist professional growth and development without changing career

Reflection

Is all career progression linear?

Audience Poll

Raise your hand if you have heard the term “career lattice?”
Career Lattice

- Method of talent development and retention
- Adaptive progression that enables employees to move in several directions, rather than just upward
- Adopted by many organizations for talent development and retention; not well adopted in healthcare

Career Lattice in Healthcare

- Not well adopted in healthcare due to specialization, training, and licensure/certification requirements
- Specialization can contribute to burnout and talent drain, while a lattice can yield a more versatile and rewarding career with balance and flexibility
- It is recommended that healthcare organizations explore and adopt the concept, although it may not be applicable in specialized niches
  - Changing attitude and behavior is more difficult than teaching new skills and competencies

“Career Growth”

- Definition of “career growth”
  - Historical: title or compensation, ladder-like
  - Lattice: challenging abilities & expanding role


https://www.wiederholdassoc.com/blog/2018/02/02/career-lattice-vs-career-ladder

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Optimizing Technician Career Growth

- Task driven vs. role driven
  - “Task”
    a usually assigned piece of work often to be finished within a certain time
  - “Role”
    a function performed in a particular operation or process

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Task Driven</th>
<th>Role Driven</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tech check tech</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Medication reconciliation</td>
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<td>3. Shift supervisor/Team Lead</td>
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<td>4. Drug shortage management</td>
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<td>5. Medication safety &amp; quality</td>
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<td>6. Budget and finance</td>
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<td>7. Drip diversion</td>
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<td>8. Audit function</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Technology/IT</td>
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<td>10. Clinical services expansion (i.e. adherence, MTM, transitions)</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Other</td>
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“Career Path”

- Sequence of roles for an employee within an organization
- Tends to align more with a lattice than a ladder
- Various positions moved through vertically, laterally, or cross functionally
Objectives

Define “career ladder” and “career lattice” and the potential application and approach in health-systems.

Develop an understanding of the potential barriers in establishing a formalized career ladder.

Discuss strategies to elevate technicians along a “career path,” in the absence of a “career ladder” and to develop leadership skills.

Texas Children’s Hospital

- Pharmacy Enterprise
  - 534 employees
  - 239 Technicians
  - 3 hospitals, 3 retail pharmacies, 1 specialty pharmacy
  - 762 beds
- No technician career ladder
- Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB) Certification required & supported
- IV certification required & supported

Barriers to Career Ladder

- Individuals within a single job description or job code performing similar or overlapping tasks with different pay
- Division of technician staff to smaller team or functions that makes coverage for shifts and vacancies more challenging
- Shift responsibilities vs. employee staffing shift
  - Example: “Central Day 8” shift can be staffed by “tech 1” or “tech 2” - same responsibilities/tasks with different pay
- All technicians at Texas Children’s within one job code
  - Inpatient dispensing (clean room), retail, compounding & repackaging, inventory support, etc.
Objectives

Define "career ladder" and "career lattice" and the potential application and approach in health-systems.

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Success without a Formalized Career Ladder

• Pharmacy leadership worked with Human Resources to advance technicians, supporting their education and training to develop skills, competencies, and abilities for new and expanded roles

• "Career lattice" mindset
  — Going back to the principle that changing attitude and behavior is more difficult than teaching new skills and competencies
  — Create positions that acknowledge pharmacy technician experience as meeting the qualifications for roles
  — Build particular skills and competencies into development plans for individuals to qualify them for positions
  • Within department & pharmacy school defaults to being more ladder-like
  • Others more lattice-like: nursing, finance, contracts administration, HR

• 239 staff level technicians; 40 technicians [16.7% of the technician workforce] have advanced to one of the following roles:
  - Assistant Director, Applications & Technical Services (1)
  - Manager, Pharmacy Financial Services (1)
  - Technician Manager (3)
  - Manager, Pharmacy Inventory (1)
  - Supervisor, Pharmacy Inventory (1)
  - Inventory Specialist (1)
  - Coordinator, Employee Development (2)
  - Coordinator, Quality & Compliance (2)
  - Medication Area Inspector (2)
  - Pharmacy Buyer (1)
  - Auditor (1)
  - Systems Analyst (4)
  - Financial Analyst (2)
  - Financial Counselor (1)
  - 340B Coordinator (1)
  - Auditor (6)
  - Systems Analyst (3)

• A number of technicians have taken varied "path" to other fields

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Technician leadership and advancement can occur along a ladder or a lattice that ultimately traces a career path.
2. In organizations where career ladders face a number of barriers, opportunities to advance technicians remain.
3. Technician advancement is deserving of our attention, focus, and commitment.

References

Activity 1:

- What strategies does your institution employ to foster pharmacy technician career advancement and professional development?
- What challenges or successes have you seen with those strategies?

Activity 2:

- What are the most unique pharmacy technician roles at your institution today? What roles are on the horizon?
- What training or development was needed to ensure technicians successfully stepped into those roles?

Activity 3:

- How do you see the role of pharmacy technicians evolving in 10 years? What roles will they fill? What is needed to get there?
- How do we continue to professionalize and develop the role of pharmacy technician as a career?