

Pharmacy technicians: making the most of their professional practice

“Pharmacy technicians are a recognised and regulated healthcare profession, and we should maximise their valuable skills and contribution. Their ability to work safely under relevant Patient Group Directions would have significant benefits for patient care and the wider NHS team and help enable pharmacists to develop further their clinical practice through independent prescribing.”

David Webb, Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for England

Introduction by Liz Fidler, Senior Professional Advisor – Pharmacy Technician Practice, and Chair of the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer’s Pharmacy Technician Professional Advisory Forum

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan outlines the intention to expand the role of pharmacy technicians as regulated healthcare professionals so the NHS can build on their potential as healthcare team members to benefit patients.

As part of developing services within community pharmacy in particular, the Department of Health and Social Care’s (DHSC) proposed addition of pharmacy technicians to the list of healthcare professionals able to supply and/or administer medicines or medicinal products via a Patient Group Direction (PGD), where appropriate, could support interventions such as vaccination drives, management of minor illness and provision of emergency hormonal contraception. The public consultation went live on 18 August 2023 for a period of six weeks.

Developing the role of pharmacy technicians will also directly enable pharmacists across community pharmacy move further into a mainstream independent prescribing role over the

coming years and help meet workforce and access challenges. It is an opportunity to ensure that pharmacists and pharmacy technicians, working together, are supported to provide safe and timely access to medicines for patients, and have rewarding and fulfilling careers.

Realising the potential of the pharmacy technician workforce in pharmacy will be critical. This document aims to outline opportunities where pharmacy technicians' knowledge, skills and expertise could add most value to the NHS team, and national education opportunities, legislation and policy direction are being developed in support.

This creates an exciting opportunity for the pharmacy professions and NHS leaders to build on the skills and knowledge of pharmacy technicians to deliver more for patients.

CPhO Pharmacy Technician Professional Advisory Forum



Members of the forum at their first meeting in June 2023

The forum seeks the expertise of experienced pharmacy technicians across all areas of practice to advise on the development of pharmacy technician professional practice in support of patient care and medicines optimisation. It provides a forum for the NHS to directly engage with pharmacy technicians in leadership positions to seek opinion and build engagement, with the aim of becoming more inclusive of pharmacy technician expertise.

What is a pharmacy technician?

The term 'Pharmacy Technician' is a protected title by law and all pharmacy technicians, whether working in the NHS, private or voluntary sectors in England, Wales and Scotland,

must be registered and are regulated by the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC). Regulation of pharmacy technicians was introduced in July 2011.

There are over 21,000 pharmacy technicians registered with GPhC in England. As key members of the pharmacy and multi-professional teams in all parts of secondary and primary care, they play a crucial role in helping patients - from the preparation and supply of medicines, to supporting patients with making the most of their medicines.

Pharmacy technicians work in a range of NHS and other settings, often in patient-facing roles:

- Hospital pharmacy departments, wards, clinics, technical service (aseptic) units
- Primary care – GP surgeries, care homes, community pharmacy
- Health and justice – prisons, immigration services
- Mental / community health services - community teams
- Ambulance services
- NHS manufacturing units
- Education – higher education, further education and training companies
- Commissioning, regulation, policy and government
- Pharmaceutical industry.



London Ambulance Service NHS Trust pharmacy team

The GPhC sets the professional regulatory standards that all pharmacy technicians must meet, in relation to education, training, conduct, performance, ethics and health. As with pharmacists, this includes the requirement to have a professional indemnity arrangement in place. Pharmacy technicians must complete a two-year accredited or recognised education programme, which can be via an apprenticeship, that meets the GPhC's Initial Education and Training Standards. The standards were modernised in 2017 to reflect patient-facing roles.

Pharmacy technicians must meet these standards when they first register and complete a professional declaration. Following this, to remain registered they must meet revalidation requirements every year to confirm that they continue to practise and meet all standards. They are accountable for their own practice and currently work under the direct supervision of pharmacists for the sale, supply and preparation of medicines.

What is pharmacy's future role in healthcare?

The last decade has seen rapid developments and increased complexity in medicines, data and technology, with demand in the NHS for clinical, patient-facing practitioners. Along with pharmacy's central role in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, this has enabled a shift in perception of the clinical care people can expect to receive from a pharmacy professional in the NHS.

Community pharmacy and primary care

In May 2023, NHS England published the [Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care](#). The plan sets out measures to improve patients' access to primary care services, including GP appointments and community pharmacy clinical services. To support this, the plan stated that the DHSC would enable pharmacy technicians to administer and supply medicines under PGDs, subject to consultation.

The plan included an announcement of additional funding of £645m over two years to expand the role and opportunities for community pharmacy by supporting seven common conditions through delivering Pharmacy First and expanding pharmacy oral contraception and blood pressure services. The DHSC is consulting the sector on this proposed expanded role.

Workforce

The first ever [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#) was published in June 2023 – developed by the NHS, backed by investment from government and created in collaboration with NHS staff and stakeholders.

The plan sets out to address gaps in the current workforce and meet the challenge of a growing and ageing population. It also outlines how the NHS will work to retain more healthcare staff, with a focus on inclusive leadership, training and development. All pharmacy teams are covered by the plan – including those employed by the NHS and primary care, and community pharmacy contractors delivering commissioned services in the NHS.

The plan commits to:

- Expanding training places for pharmacists by 29% to around 4,300 by 2028/29; and by around half overall to almost 5,000 by 2031/32.

- Growing the number of pharmacy technicians in future years through apprenticeships.

The plan's ambitious programme of pharmacy workforce transformation aims to support the NHS's strategy for effective medicines use, reduction in health inequalities and excellence in patient care.

Independent prescribing

From September 2026, all newly qualified pharmacists will be independent prescribers on registration, following reform of their initial education and training. This is a gamechanger for pharmacy teams, patients and the NHS, with approximately 2,800 newly registered pharmacist independent prescribers due to join the workforce every year.

These highly skilled practitioners will create improved access and quality of care for patients and, importantly, a more flexible workforce with skills that are equally applicable in all pharmacy settings, supporting NHS clinical teams to work in new ways.



Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust pharmacy team

Pharmacy technicians and the future of healthcare

As an integral part of these new policy developments, NHS England's aim is for pharmacy technicians, working within their scope of practice, to carry out a broader range of roles and services. This transformation is important across all sectors of practice. A more interesting and varied role for pharmacy technicians will lead to improved recruitment and retention in the profession, increasing its contribution to patient care, and supporting the wider pharmacy and multi-professional team.

Patient Group Directions

A PGD is a written instruction that allows registered healthcare professionals to supply and/or administer a medicine directly to a group of patients with an identified clinical condition. PGDs are not a form of prescribing. The governance involved in the consideration, development, authorisation and maintenance of PGDs ensures the safe and effective supply and administration of medicines by a designated healthcare professional.

The following professions can currently work under PGDs:

- chiropodists and podiatrists
- dental hygienists
- dental therapists
- dieticians
- midwives
- nurses
- occupational therapists
- optometrists
- orthoptists
- orthotists and prosthetists
- paramedics
- pharmacists
- physiotherapists
- radiographers
- speech and language therapists.

For pharmacy technicians to be able to supply and administer certain prescription-only medicines via a PGD, where appropriate, is an important step forward in increasing access to more clinical services for patients.

Pharmacy technicians would be required to undertake additional training as defined in each PGD. Only those who have been assessed as fully competent and who have completed the relevant specific training would be able to work under the PGD. This is aligned with the practice for all other healthcare professionals who can supply and administer medicines under a PGD. There are currently no plans to amend the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 to enable pharmacy technicians to supply and/or administer controlled drugs under a PGD.

Giving pharmacy technicians across the NHS the opportunity to work under PGDs will help ensure that pharmacy teams have the right mix of skills to meet their local community's health needs and safely maximise the contribution they make to healthcare.

Post-registration education and development is being provided to community pharmacy technicians to equip them to take on more responsibility for clinical services and manage dispensing activity.

In addition, the DHSC is reviewing the legislation around supervision in the Medicines Act and how this applies to pharmacy technicians. Historically the pharmacy technician role has been focused on medicine supply functions (dispensing and checking), however these roles can also be provided by other non-regulated pharmacy staff members.



Haddenham Pharmacy team

Examples of practice from members of the CPhO Pharmacy Technician Professional Advisory Forum:

Donna Bartlett, Chief Pharmacy Technician, Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust and Professional Lead for England, Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK

Pharmacy technicians in secondary care being able to administer or supply medicines under a PGD would benefit patients in many ways.

Pharmacy technicians could use PGDs within the pre-operative setting, assessing individuals in pre-op clinics. Within this role they could supply prescription only medicines as part of a methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus decolonisation where an individual has screened as positive, following local guidance. They could also supply bowel cleansing preparations to individuals to take at home prior to planned bowel surgery. In both scenarios the pharmacy technician could use their knowledge and expertise to fully counsel the individuals on the appropriate use of the medicines.

In clinics where, after assessment, medicines may be required (e.g. mupirocin nasal ointment at pre op clinics, vitamin K at anti-coagulant clinics), currently these need to be

supplied by a nurse or pharmacist and the patient has to wait for a referral to see another healthcare professional.

Pharmacy technicians in advanced roles in the emergency care setting are often part of a team triaging patients. Working under PGDs would mean a pharmacy technician could administer medicines that is immediately required at the time of triage, such as pain relief. Pharmacy technicians would also be able to use PGDs in vaccination clinics in the same way as primary care, including vaccinating front-line staff.

Dawn Cassidy, Chief Pharmacy Technician, Health in Justice, Practice Plus Group

In Health in Justice, pharmacy technicians are key members of multi professional primary care teams. They manage all aspects of medicines use following the patient journey from arrival into the secure establishment until they leave.

The proposed changes in PGD legislation, combined with focused training and development, would empower pharmacy technicians to upskill and enhance their clinical skills. This would allow them to independently manage more complex medicines effectively during routine medicines administration times. They could also lead minor illness clinics, working under PGDs for prescription only medicines.

Immunisation and vaccination training along with working under PGDs could facilitate pharmacy technician-led vaccination clinics to improve vaccine uptake and service delivery. Other examples of potential pharmacy technician-led services include treatment for sexual health conditions and provision of reproductive health and contraception services.

Naomi Finch, Associate Director of Medicines Optimisation and Clinical Lead for Community Pharmacy, Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board

As we move towards having an increased pool of pharmacist independent prescribers in community pharmacy, there is a need to consider how we can best use pharmacy technicians to support clinical service provision in community pharmacy.

The supply of medicines via a PGD forms an important part of current national community pharmacy clinical services, and services which are in the pipeline. There are clear benefits to patients and the wider NHS system in enabling pharmacy technicians to work under relevant PGDs in community pharmacy. Increasing the range of professionals able to provide these services, and therefore the number of available consultations for patients, reduces pressure on the wider NHS team. This is also an important step for the pharmacy technician profession to develop and evolve to meet the needs of patients now and in the future.

In addition, integrated care boards are able to commission local services via community pharmacies to meet the needs of their populations. These services will vary by area and provide a new opportunity to meet the needs of patients in a community pharmacy setting.

Laura Hannar, Clinical Pharmacy Technician, Durham West Primary Care Network

Pharmacy technicians working under PGDs in community pharmacies would be able to engage more with other local community pharmacies and GP surgeries to support referral pathways. They would also be able to take part in training and conversations on best practice within the primary care network.

Pharmacy technicians working under PGDs in community pharmacy could also improve patient access – both for walk-ins and referrals. It would relieve pressures on the wider community pharmacy team and allow community pharmacists to focus on other services including independent prescribing.

Potential areas of practice for pharmacy technicians in PCNs could include better access for patients to family planning services.

Finally, having pharmacy technicians able to train in vaccination services under a PGD both in PCNs and community pharmacy would support an increase in service provision, relieving pressures on the wider NHS teams and hospital admissions.