

# Qualitative study exploring perceptions and experiences of Pharmacy Technicians' professional identity in Scotland



Aileen Begley<sup>1\*</sup> / Karen Kelly<sup>1</sup> / Elaine Paton<sup>1</sup> / Richard Lowrie<sup>1, 2</sup>  
1. NHS GG&C, Clarkston Court, 56 Busby Road, Glasgow, G76 7AT  
2. Centre for Homelessness and Inclusion Health, University of Edinburgh, EH8 9AG  
\*aileen.Begley@nhs.scot

## Introduction

Pharmacy technicians became a registered profession in 2011, in the UK.  
There are approximately 2, 500 pharmacy technicians and 5, 500 pharmacists registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) in Scotland <sup>(1)</sup>  
  
In the USA, Canada and many European countries, pharmacy technicians require national or state registration <sup>(2)</sup>

### Pharmacy technicians worldwide share workplace challenges: <sup>(3)</sup>

- Job role
- Scope of practice
- Level of pharmacist' supervision
- Education
- Access to funded higher-level education post registration

## Aim

- Explore pharmacy technicians' perceptions and experiences of their professional status and professional identity

## Method

- Following approval from the West of Scotland Research and Ethics Service Scientific Officer, snowball sampling was used to recruit pharmacy technicians from the fourteen Scottish health boards to take part in interviews
- Semi-structured interviews were piloted on four participants from three Scottish health boards (acute, primary care, and specialist roles)
- Thirty-six pharmacy technicians were interviewed, including four participants from the pilot interviews
- Pharmacy sectors represented were Acute = 23, mental health = 1, rehabilitation hospital = 1, primary care = 8, community pharmacy = 3
- Interviews took place between May and August 2023
- Twenty-two participants were interviewed in-person, fourteen were interviewed on-line
- Interviews lasted between 17 - 91 minutes, were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, accuracy checked, analysed thematically using framework approach and NVIVO V12 software
- Three researchers analysed data including initial coding, categorisation, theme generation. Disagreements discussed and addressed within research team

## Results

### Catalysts to professional development included:

- Pharmacy technician led management and leadership
- Pharmacy technicians' readiness to undertake traditional pharmacist roles
- Potential impact of having strengthened professional identity

### Key factors described as limiting moves to increase technicians' responsibilities and scope of practice

- Absence of a structured, funded pharmacy technician career framework
- Lack of post-registration higher level education qualification
- Lack of support to use their initiative to take new clinical and educational opportunities

### Other themes described pharmacy technicians

- Feeling 'stuck in the shadow' of pharmacists
- Under-represented in policy and practice
- Marginalised, undervalued and underpaid
- Lack of awareness of technician roles amongst wider healthcare team
- Perceiving more development opportunities available in primary care sector
- Being squeezed between pharmacists and pharmacy support workers
- Pharmacy technicians lack of confidence and feeling unsupported in the delivery of clinical roles

## Conclusions

- Professional registration does not appear to have strengthened professional identity
- Pervasive lack of development opportunities impacting negatively on pharmacy technicians and therefore service delivery across Scotland
- Lack of previous qualitative evaluation limits comparisons with perceptions and experiences of pharmacy technicians worldwide.
- Further research could explore pharmacy technicians' perceptions of potential impact of emerging career framework on developing roles and responsibilities.

## Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks go to thirty-six pharmacy technicians who took part in the interviews, and to NHS GG&C Pharmacy (Catalytic Funding Challenge Grant)

## References

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