



The Not-What-You-Would-Expect Guide to
Pharmacy Tech

*Honestly, it's
not for
everyone!*



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What is a Pharmacy Technician?

A pharmacy technician is a healthcare provider who performs pharmacy-related functions, generally working under the direct supervision of a licensed pharmacist. Pharmacy technicians work in a variety of locations, such as community, retail, and hospital pharmacies, but can also work for long-term care facilities, pharmaceutical manufacturers, third-party insurance companies, computer software companies, or in government or teaching. Pharmacy technicians are important to the field for several reasons:

- **Efficiency:** Pharmacy technicians take care of routine tasks, freeing pharmacists to focus on more complex medication-related issues, including drug therapy monitoring, medication reconciliation, patient counseling, and clinical services.
- **Patient Safety:** They provide an additional check for potential errors in prescriptions, thereby increasing patient safety. They often assist in filling prescriptions, including counting pills and labeling bottles, a process where mistakes can have serious consequences.
- **Improved Access:** By taking on routine tasks, pharmacy technicians allow pharmacists to engage in more patient-focused roles such as health screenings or immunization services, improving public access to these important services.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Pharmacy technicians often cost less to employ than pharmacists. By handling tasks that do not require a pharmacist's level of expertise, they help make the overall healthcare system more cost-effective.
- **Customer Service:** Pharmacy technicians often are the first point of contact for patients in community pharmacies. They play a crucial role in patient satisfaction by providing good customer service.

In conclusion, pharmacy technicians are critical members of the pharmacy team, helping to enhance the efficiency and safety of pharmacy operations, which ultimately benefits patient care. They play a significant role in ensuring that the pharmacy functions smoothly and that patients receive their medications promptly and accurately.

Donald Collins, PhTA, '24

"Because it's online, you can be anywhere. One of my instructors was teaching from Hawaii one day!"



Day-to-Day Tasks

The duties of pharmacy technicians vary with the location of the work.

- **Prescription Processing:** This is the most common duty of a pharmacy technician. It involves receiving prescription orders from patients or electronically from doctors' offices, checking the order for completeness, and then entering the prescription information into the computer system.
- **Filling Prescriptions:** Pharmacy technicians select the correct medication, count or measure the appropriate dosage, label the medication container, and package the prescription. Technicians must pay close attention to details to ensure patient safety.
- **Customer Service:** In many pharmacies, especially retail locations, pharmacy technicians often interact directly with customers. This can involve answering questions, explaining how to take medication, or processing payments. They also communicate with doctors' offices and insurance companies to resolve any issues with prescriptions.
- **Inventory Management:** Pharmacy technicians often help manage the pharmacy's inventory. They may stock shelves, place orders for new supplies, remove expired medications, and keep track of what medications are in stock.
- **Compounding Medications:** While not as common, some pharmacy technicians, particularly those working in hospital pharmacies or specialty compounding pharmacies, may prepare specialized medications according to instructions provided by a pharmacist. This might include mixing specific dosages of different medications, preparing topical creams, or preparing intravenous (IV) mixtures.
- **Quality Assurance:** This involves ensuring the cleanliness and organization of the pharmacy, adhering to safety procedures and regulations, and checking the work of other technicians to ensure accuracy and safety.
- **Administrative Tasks:** Pharmacy technicians might handle phone calls, maintain patient records, manage cash registers, and perform other general administrative duties.



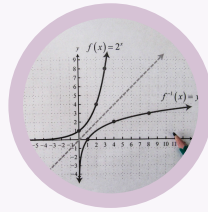
Skills & Competencies

By developing these skills, a pharmacy technician can perform their duties effectively, contribute positively to their workplace, and provide excellent care for patients.



Attention to Detail

Pharmacy technicians often deal with complex prescriptions that require meticulous attention. A small error could have significant consequences for a patient's health.



Mathematical

Pharmacy technicians must be able to accurately count pills, measure amounts, and calculate dosages. Basic understanding of algebra and proportions can be very useful.



Customer Service

In many settings, pharmacy technicians interact directly with customers or patients, answering questions and handling purchases. They must be patient, empathetic, and capable of providing excellent service.



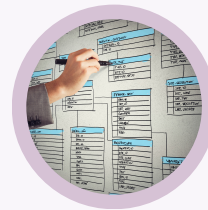
Communication

Good communication is essential in the role of a pharmacy technician. They must effectively communicate with pharmacists, other healthcare professionals, and patients, both verbally and in writing.



Technical

Pharmacy technicians need to be comfortable using computers and other technology, as they often use software to process prescriptions and maintain patient records.



Organizational

Given the multiple tasks that pharmacy technicians have to manage, including filling prescriptions, managing inventory, and addressing customer needs, strong organizational skills are crucial.



Problem-Solving

Pharmacy technicians often need to resolve issues such as insurance problems, medication shortages, or discrepancies in a prescription, requiring critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.



Ethics & Integrity

Pharmacy technicians deal with sensitive information and controlled substances, so they must be trustworthy and adhere to all ethical guidelines and regulations.



Stress Management

The work of a pharmacy technician can be fast-paced and stressful, especially in busy settings like hospitals or large retail pharmacies. Being able to stay calm under pressure is essential.



Physical Stamina

The job often requires standing for long periods, and sometimes lifting heavy boxes of supplies.



Teamwork

Pharmacy technicians work as part of a team alongside pharmacists and other healthcare professionals. Being able to collaborate effectively and maintain a positive working relationship with colleagues is important.



Professional Ethics & Legal Issues

Pharmacy technicians, like all healthcare professionals, must navigate a complex landscape of ethical and legal issues in their work. These can include:

- **Confidentiality:** Pharmacy technicians have access to sensitive patient information, including medical histories and prescribed medications. They are legally and ethically obligated to maintain patient confidentiality, as mandated by laws such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in the U.S.
- **Accuracy:** The potential for harm in the case of inaccurate medication dispensing places a heavy ethical and legal responsibility on pharmacy technicians. They must ensure accuracy in every aspect of their work, from interpreting prescriptions to counting and labeling medications.
- **Professional Boundaries:** Pharmacy technicians should maintain professional relationships with patients and avoid any behavior that could be perceived as inappropriate or a conflict of interest.
- **Controlled Substances:** Pharmacy technicians must follow stringent legal guidelines when handling controlled substances to prevent misuse or diversion. This includes accurate record-keeping and reporting any suspicious prescriptions or behaviors.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Pharmacy technicians serve diverse patient populations and should respect cultural, personal, and religious differences that might impact a patient's approach to medication use.
- **Continuing Education:** Technicians have an ethical obligation to stay current in their field to provide the highest quality of care. This includes knowing about new medications, changes to laws or regulations, and developments in pharmacy technology.
- **Report Ethical Misconduct:** If a pharmacy technician witnesses unethical behavior, such as a coworker diverting medications, they have an ethical and often legal obligation to report it to their supervisor or appropriate authorities.
- **Patient Counseling:** Technicians should understand their role in patient counseling. In many jurisdictions, there are legal limitations to the advice or information a pharmacy technician can provide to a patient, with more in-depth counseling reserved for pharmacists.
- **Product Integrity:** Technicians are responsible for ensuring that products are stored correctly, are not expired, and that the supply chain is secure. Dispensing expired or compromised products can have legal repercussions and can harm patients.

Job Outlook

BLS.gov projects the job outlook for Pharmacy Technicians to grow

7%

from 2023-2033*

Possible work settings for a Pharmacy Technician could include:

Chain/Independent Pharmacies

Approximately 70% of entry-level pharmacy technicians in the United States are employed in retail pharmacy. Pharmacy technicians in this setting help dispense about 2.5 billion prescriptions per year. Their duties include but are not limited to Processing customer prescription data, Filling and labelling medications, Managing inventory, Answering phone calls, Dealing with insurance companies, and Distributing medicines to customers. In some states, technicians may be responsible for taking new and refilling prescription orders over the phone and transferring prescriptions between pharmacies. Independent pharmacies represent approximately 40% of all community pharmacies in the United States and employ thousands of pharmacy technicians nationwide. Responsibilities are similar to those in the chain setting but may include compounding, filling specialty packaging, and delivering medications directly to patients.

Nuclear Pharmacy

In nuclear pharmacy, technicians are trained and certified in handling and preparing radioactive medications. Roles for technicians in this setting include performing mathematical calculations, compounding, labelling, inventory management, and ensuring that radiopharmaceuticals are safely handled and transported. Less than 1% of pharmacy technicians have specialized training to work in a nuclear pharmacy.

Pharmaceutical Industry

The pharmaceutical industry develops, produces, and markets drugs. In this setting, responsibilities may include Triage and coordination of drug information requests, Assisting with literature searches, Writing drug information documents, and Other quality assurance processes.

Hospital Pharmacy

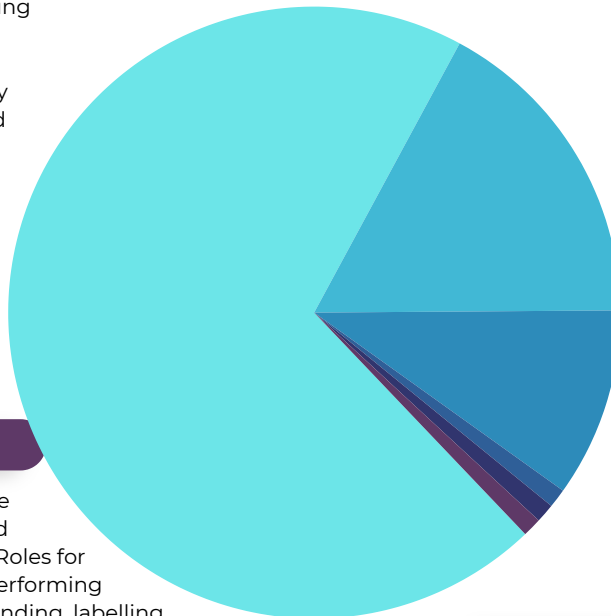
Approximately 17% of all pharmacy technicians work in a hospital setting. Responsibilities include Interpreting written prescription orders, Performing pharmacy calculations, Compounding medications, Refilling automated medication dispensers, Medication reconciliation, and Delivering medicines to patients within the hospital. Becoming certified will make you more competitive in employment as a hospital pharmacy technician.

Managed care

Health insurance plans and pharmacy benefit managers employ pharmacy technicians to ensure high-quality services. Common duties include Interacting with customers about offered pharmacy services, Review prior authorization requests, Claims adjudication, and Providing ongoing education and training to physicians' offices and facilities. Less than 10% of pharmacy technicians work in the managed care setting.

Government Agency

Local, state, and federal government agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Prisons, Veterans Administration, Indian Health Service, and Armed Forces all require the expertise of skilled pharmacy technicians. In these settings, technicians can perform several tasks, including receiving and reviewing prescriptions, inventory management of drug products and pharmaceutical supplies, replenishment in automated pharmacy dispensing systems, compounding, and dispensing medications to patients.



*Cited projections may not reflect local economic fluctuations and do not guarantee job placement. BLS.gov data from September 19, 2024.

References

Fung S, Gilmour C, McCracken D, et al. Nontraditional Roles for Certified Pharmacy Technicians in a Pharmaceutical Company. J Am Pharm Assoc. 2006; 46(4):507-510.
Nelson D. Job Description for Managed Care Technicians. Houston Chronicle. 12 July 2015.
Pharmacy Technician Careers. American Society of Health-System Pharmacists. 12 July 2015.

Career Advancement

Pharmacy technicians can advance their careers in several ways, often depending on their individual career goals, interests, and the opportunities available in their specific location or setting. Here are some common paths:

Further Education

Advancing one's education is a common method for career progression. For example, some pharmacy technicians might choose to go back to school to become pharmacists, requiring a Doctor of Pharmacy degree (Pharm.D.). Others might pursue a degree in a related field, such as healthcare administration or public health.

Specialization

Some pharmacy technicians choose to specialize in a specific area of pharmacy practice, such as compounding, chemotherapy, nuclear pharmacy, or long-term care. Gaining specialized skills can lead to more responsibilities and potentially higher pay.

Certifications

Earning advanced certifications can demonstrate expertise in certain areas and make a pharmacy technician more competitive for advanced positions. For example, in the U.S., the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board offers certifications in areas such as compounded sterile preparations and medication history.

Management Roles

With experience, pharmacy technicians can move into supervisory or managerial roles, overseeing the work of other technicians. These positions often require strong leadership and organizational skills.

Industry Roles

Some pharmacy technicians may transition to work in the pharmaceutical industry, where they might work in sales, marketing, or research roles.

Education and Training Roles

Experienced pharmacy technicians might also move into roles where they train or educate others, either in an academic setting or within their own pharmacy.

Regulatory or Policy Roles

Pharmacy technicians with an interest in regulatory issues might choose to work for government agencies or regulatory bodies.

In pursuing any of these paths, it's essential for pharmacy technicians to stay up-to-date with the latest developments in the field. This often involves continuing education, whether through formal coursework, workshops, or professional conferences. Networking can also be beneficial, as it can lead to new opportunities and connections in the field.



Education & Training

In the United States, the minimum requirement for many pharmacy technician positions is a high school diploma or equivalent. However, some employers may prefer or require a post-secondary certificate or associate degree in pharmacy technology. These programs typically cover topics such as medical and pharmaceutical terminology, basic anatomy related to pharmacology, pharmaceutical calculations, pharmacy law and ethics, and hands-on skills like techniques for dispensing medication. The pharmacy technician Associate's degree and diploma programs at American National University are programmatically accredited by the Pharmacy Technician Accrediting Commission (PTAC), a collaboration between the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists and the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education.

In addition to ANU's institutional accreditation from the Distance Education Accrediting Commission, the programmatic accreditation achieved by ANU's pharmacy technician programs is a further validation of the quality of the program. Through a rigorous evaluation process, ANU has demonstrated compliance with 15 competency standards.

All students wishing to enroll in the Pharmacy Technician program will be required to pass a background check prior to the start of the program.

Hands-on Training

Our hands-on pharmacy technician training will give you the experience and confidence to succeed in your externship and future career.

- Lab Kits can include: a counting tray with a well and spatula, mortar and pestle, a digital scale, syringes, and placebo medicine to learn dispensing.
- Our pharmacy technician programs' enhanced software learning experience is provided by PioneerRx. PioneerRx is a real-life pharmacy software system used across the United States, which will prepare students for externship and their new profession as a pharmacy technician.
- In-Person Externship (Associate's degree only): Two 120-hour, for a total of 240 hours, externships so that students gain hands on experience in a pharmacy.

	PhTA	PhTD
BIO206 Diseases of the Human Body	✓	
MED107 Medical Terminology		✓
COM151 The Microsoft Office (R)	✓	
PTA110 Pharmacy Calculation for Technicians	✓	✓
MED218 Communication for the Healthcare Professional	✓	✓
BUS217 Organizational Behavior	✓	
PTA165 Pharmacy Law & Ethics	✓	✓
PTA176 Community Pharmacy Operation & Laboratory	✓	✓
PTA205 Pharmacology I for the Pharmacy Technician	✓	✓
PTA207 Pharmacology II for the Pharmacy Technician	✓	✓
PTA250 Pharmacy Software Applications	✓	✓
PTA276 Institutional Pharmacy Operation & Laboratory	✓	✓
PTA279 Community Pharmacy Technician Externship	✓	✓
PTA288 Pharmacy Technician Exam Success Class	✓	✓
PTA289 Pharmacy Technician Externship II	✓	✓
Electives	4	
General Education	6	
Total Credits	96	48

Evanne Rakers, PhTA, '12

"The science interactive kits are probably the coolest thing I've ever seen!" She excitedly says. "We got a little human skeleton that we actually got to refer to as we're doing the schoolwork... that was nice to have something right there, and you could look at it and see it for yourself, in person!"



Certification

In addition to education, pharmacy technicians may also need to be licensed or registered, depending on the state's laws. It's important to note that even in states where certification isn't required, having a certification can make a pharmacy technician more competitive when applying for jobs. It demonstrates a certain level of knowledge and skill, and some employers may require it.

ANU's Pharmacy Technician Associate degree and diploma programs prepare students to sit for the Certified Pharmacy Technician (CPhT) exam offered through the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board. The benefit of an Associate's degree program is that college credit can be applied to future degrees at ANU or any other university as transfer credits.

State-by-State Requirements*

	Board-Approved Training	Board-Approved Certification
Alabama	✓	
California	Associate's Degree OR Certification	
Florida	✓	
Illinois	✓	✓
Indiana	Board-Approved Training OR Certification	
Louisiana	✓	✓
Maryland	✓	✓
Massachusetts	Board-Approved Training OR 500 hours of employment	✓
Minnesota	✓	
Nevada	Board-Approved Training OR 1500 hours employment OR Certification	
New Mexico	✓	✓
North Dakota	✓	✓
Ohio	Board-Approved Training (to be a Registered PhT) OR Certification (to be a Certified PhT)	
Pennsylvania	✓	
Rhode Island	Board-Approved Training OR Certification	
South Carolina	✓	✓
Texas		✓
Virginia	✓	✓
Washington	✓	
Washington D.C.	✓	✓
West Virginia	✓	✓

*States not listed require a high school diploma or GED. States may have additional requirements not listed here, such as fingerprinting and background checks.

Advanced Certifications

Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB) also offers credentials to individuals who wish to distinguish themselves in the pharmacy technician field and build rewarding careers in healthcare.

Advanced Certified Pharmacy Technician (CPhT-Adv)

CPhTs who earn the CPhT-Adv Certification are recognized for their expertise and experience and demonstrate an unwavering commitment to advancing medication safety.

Eligibility Requirements

A candidate must hold an active PTCB CPhT Certification and have completed:

- ✓ at least 3 years of work experience as a pharmacy technician within the past 8 years, and
- ✓ at least four PTCB Assessment-Based Certificate Programs or three Certificate Programs

Compounded Sterile Preparation Technician® (CSPT®) Certification

Becoming a Certified Compounded Sterile Preparation Technician® (CSPT®) demonstrates a CPhT's knowledge and skill as a specialized pharmacy technician, as well as their commitment to the role they play in ensuring medication safety. Earning the CSPT Certification, provides the opportunity to be recognized by your employer and colleagues for successfully meeting PTCB's rigorous requirements for this advanced credential.

Eligibility Requirements

- ✓ To apply to become a CSPT, a candidate must be an active PTCB CPhT in good standing and satisfy PTCB's education and/or work criteria.
- ✓ An active PTCB CPhT must qualify under one of the following pathways:
 - Pathway 1: Completion of, or enrollment in, a PTCB-Recognized Education/Training Program for the CSPT Program AND one year of full-time continuous compounded sterile preparation (CSP) work experience.
 - Pathway 2: Three years of full-time continuous compounded sterile preparation (CSP) work experience

PTCB Certificate courses include:

- Medication History Certificate
- Technician Product Verification Certificate
- Hazardous Drug Management Certificate
- Billing and Reimbursement Certificate
- Controlled Substances Diversion Prevention Certificate
- Immunization Administration Certificate
- Point-of-Care Testing Certificate
- Medication Therapy Management Certificate
- Regulatory Compliance Certificate
- Supply Chain and Inventory Management Certificate
- Nonsterile Compounding Certificate





Resources

Organizations

Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB): This is the organization that provides certification for pharmacy technicians in the United States. Their website offers resources for studying for the certification exam, maintaining certification, and continuing education.

National Healthcareer Association (NHA): Another organization that certifies pharmacy technicians in the U.S., the NHA also provides a range of educational and career resources.

American Association of Pharmacy Technicians (AAPT): This is a national professional organization for pharmacy technicians in the U.S., providing continuing education, advocacy, and networking opportunities.

American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP): Although it's primarily for pharmacists, ASHP also provides resources and advocacy for pharmacy technicians, including those working in health-system settings.

Industry Websites and Publications

Pharmacy Times: This industry publication covers news and provides continuing education for all pharmacy professionals, including pharmacy technicians.

Drug Topics: Another industry publication with news, articles, and continuing education that could be helpful for pharmacy technicians.

Forums and Social Media Groups

Reddit Pharmacy Technician Forum (/r/PharmacyTechnician): A subreddit where pharmacy technicians can ask questions, share experiences, and seek advice.

Indeed Pharmacy Technician Forum: A forum provided by Indeed where pharmacy technicians can discuss their work and career.

Facebook Groups: There are many Facebook groups dedicated to pharmacy technicians where members can share experiences, ask questions, and provide support to each other.