



Association of Pharmacy Technicians United Kingdom

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By email

The workforce consultation team

Health Education England

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Association of Pharmacy Technicians United Kingdom (APTUK) response to the

Facing the Facts, Shaping the Future

A draft health and care workforce strategy for England to 2027 consultation

The Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK (APTUK) is the professional leadership body for pharmacy technicians throughout in the United Kingdom. We are the only body that represents pharmacy technicians and all sectors of pharmacy in the UK. The APTUK, through strong, influential representative leadership, supports patient centred professionalism by encouraging in our membership, the attitudes and behaviours associated with outstanding healthcare professionals. We work on behalf of pharmacy technicians, championing and safeguarding the pharmacy technician profession, enhancing the education and scope of practice. To achieve our objectives and goals APTUK works closely and collaboratively with the other pharmacy organisations to help deliver professional excellence and identify the views of a range of pharmacy stakeholders in number of forums.

Introduction

Pharmacy Technicians are healthcare professionals who are registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) for their license to practise. The title of Pharmacy Technician is protected in law and can only be applied to those who meet and maintain the professional standards set by the GPhC.

Pharmacy technicians are a vital part of the pharmacy team, working under the supervision of a pharmacist.



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They are professional skilled and essential members of the healthcare and pharmacy team, who broadly prepare, dispense, supply and issue a wide range and variety of medicines to patients. They also take an active role in providing patients with guidance on taking medicines.

Qualified and registered Pharmacy Technicians are involved in activities such as:

- medicines optimisation
- manufacturing
- aseptic dispensing
- quality control
- training and development
- procurement
- information technology
- clinical trials
- medicines information
- supervision and management of staff.

The Pharmacy team is made up of Pharmacists, Pharmacy Technicians, Pharmacy Assistants (also known as Dispensing Assistants and sometimes called Dispensing Technicians) and in community pharmacies, Medicines Counter Assistants. Pharmacy Assistants and Medicines Counter Assistants are often called Pharmacy Support Staff.

Pharmacy Technicians, as registered professionals, are responsible and accountable for their own accurate and safe practice.

APTUK welcomes the introduction of a draft health and care workforce strategy for England 2027. As the Professional Leadership body for Pharmacy Technicians we are committed to supporting the delivery of professional excellence and patient centred care for the health and wellbeing of patients, and all pharmacy service users within the NHS. APTUK acknowledges that the roles of Pharmacy Technicians and that of other health care professionals need to evolve to meet the increased demands being placed on NHS services as outlined in the Five Year Forward View (FYFV).



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APTUK recognises the importance of HEEs collaboration between the GPhC, employers and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, to ensure a sustainable approach to the provision of high quality patient care by registered pharmacy professionals. However, we believe that APTUK should be included within this collaboration to provide the views of registered Pharmacy Technicians.

As of the 6th March 2018 there are 19,511 registered pharmacy technicians on the GPhC register who reside in England. A high percentage of these registrants are employed by the NHS and within Community pharmacy and are involved in providing a patient based medicines service. The role of the Pharmacy Technician continues to develop as new working practices are trailed and analysed. We are encouraged by current Pharmacy Technician pilot programs funded by the Pharmacy Integration Fund (PIF), and look forward to reviewing the outcomes of these schemes. We would also welcome discussions about the modernisation of Pharmacy Technician Initial Education Standards to reflect the changing requirements of the role, and believe placement based learning would be beneficial.

APTUK would also approve of a review of post registration Pharmacy Technician training. We would be pleased to advice on the development of higher level qualifications. Thus providing the educational framework to support advanced roles experienced Pharmacy Technicians may undertake, as part of a wider Multidisciplinary team.

We would also support the standardisation of Accredited Checking Pharmacy Technician courses, for attendees from all sectors. This would allow for a smoother transition between sectors if needed and improved recruitment processes. We believe the pre- pharmacist recruitment strategy to ensure sufficient numbers are trained should also apply to pre-registration Pharmacy Technicians to ensure continuation and succession planning of the workforce.

The APTUK welcomes the opportunity to respond to the HEE draft health and care workforce strategy for England to 2027 consultation and responds to the questions as set out in the consultation.



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Questions

1. *Do you support the six principles proposed to support better workforce planning; and In particular, aligning financial, policy, best practice and service planning in the future?*

APTUK response

To enable a greater understanding of how this draft workforce strategy is applicable to Pre-registration and Registered Pharmacy Technicians we feel it is important to share information about the diverse roles currently undertaken by our members. As previously indicated, as of the 6th March this year there were 19,5111 registered Pharmacy Technicians who reside in England. Pharmacy Technicians provide Pharmacy services in the following settings,

*Acute Hospital Trusts

*Mental Health Trusts

*Health and Justice System

*Military sector

*Community Pharmacy

*Industry

*Community Healthcare Services

*Primary Care, including Care Homes, GP Practices and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs)

Pharmacy Technicians are also employed within other fields which have a direct relationship to NHS pharmacy services including Inspectorate services, Education, and Regulation services.

We support the six principles proposed to support better workforce planning, and believe that the following could be done to enhance their impact.

APTUK receive no official NHS funding to support its members and is operated by members of the Pharmacy Technician profession who provide voluntary management and support to the organisation. We recognise the benefits of having an appropriate learning framework in place to support our members from foundation level practice to an advanced level practice. A Foundation Framework is in place but funding is needed to deliver this across the workforce. We believe that a Structured Foundation Practice, fully commissioned and funded is needed to ensure the development of the Pharmacy Technician workforce now and in the future. We believe that all



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professional leadership bodies should receive appropriate funding to develop supportive resources for our members.

APTUK in collaboration, with the University of East Anglia, undertook a research study in 2016 entitled 'identifying the roles of Pharmacy Technicians in the UK'. Questionnaires were developed to capture Pharmacy Technicians responses to a variety of questions. The respondent rates were analysed and the highest level of respondents were from the 50-59 age group category attributing to 30% of the overall response rate. This compared to the lower response rates in the under 20, and the 20-29 age group, where respondent rates equated to 1.4% to 18.6 % respectively. As this workforce strategy is looking towards 2027 we believe appropriate measures need to be out in place to support the profession as experienced members of staff retire and allow for succession planning.

Retaining existing staff has the most immediate impact. APTUK recognise that structured career pathways are needed to keep advanced practitioners in the profession rather than Pharmacy Technicians leaving to pursue other opportunities outside of the profession. We recognise that an increase in Pre- registration Trainee Pharmacy Technician posts funded and commissioned is needed. There should also be consistency in regards the numbers of posts created and we would encourage that the same process be used across the regions and HEE geography.

The role of the Pharmacy Technician continues to expand and is being utilised to support the delivery of NHS services, in staff groups where recruitment shortages are apparent. One such example of this is the evolving role of Pharmacy Technicians administering medicines, a task historically undertaken by Registered Nurses. We believe in the future both staff groups could benefit from the expansion of inter and intra-professional learning and working to benefit patient care.

APTUK promotes a healthy work life balance for Pharmacy Technicians, and would encourage the NHS to give greater access to agile working where possible, and the creation of flexible working patterns to support this. Many Pharmacy Technicians are working at maximum capacity and this needs to be addressed by NHS employees to prevent professional burnout and disillusionment which could lead to people leaving the profession.



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APTUK are encouraged by the NHS employee's survey which give Pharmacy Technicians the opportunity to engage with their employees and provide feedback about their role. We also believe that recognising and rewarding employees will make the workforce feel more valued and motivated.

2. *What measures are needed to secure the staff the system needs for the future; and how can actions already under way be made more effective?*

APTUK response

APTUK supports the concept that the NHS needs to do more to attract newly qualified staff into substantive employment and retain its current workforce. The number of vacant Pharmacy Technician posts reflects that of other professions, with Agency Staff being recruited for certain roles that employees are unable to fulfil.

We believe that a national recruitment process akin to that provided for other professional groups such as Pharmacists and Nurses would attract more people to the profession. The development of a nationwide return to practice guide would also be beneficial.

Funding is being received from the Pharmacy Integration Fund to train Pharmacy Technicians post registration. Leadership courses, Accuracy Checking courses and the funding of 60 Pharmacy Technicians to support the Medicines Optimisation agenda in Care Homes have been supported by this fund. However, this funding is only available to Pharmacy Technicians employed within specific sectors and is not available to all members of the profession. The number and type of training courses offered to Pharmacy Technicians needs to expand, and a coherent programme developed to support Foundation to Advanced practise, which will encourage working across different disciplines.

3. *How can we ensure the system more effectively trains, educates and invests in the new and current workforce?*

APTUK response

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APTUK recognise that more must be done to promote the role of the Pharmacy Technician and to encourage more people into the profession. We support 'The Step into the NHS' campaign and would ask that pharmacy be included within this. We would ask that further information regarding the role of the Pharmacy Technician and vocational training pathways were promoted. Engaging with schools and the 12- 14 age group is key to attracting younger people to consider the NHS as an employee.

Marketing the role of Pharmacy Technicians is essential in attracting people into the profession and we would support a national recruitment campaign which would include various publications such as TV adverts etc, these are currently used to promote other professionals with the NHS.

As the role of the Pharmacy Technicians continues to evolve we believe that the current educational programs pitched at Level 3 and Level 4 need reviewing, to support these advancing roles. We would encourage that the courses provided are revised to include greater clinical content and additionally leadership modules. We believe that there must be measurable quality within work based learning to ensure patient safety and the delivery of high quality care, meeting the needs of the Five Year Forward View, is embedded in learning outcomes. The development and delivery of national programmes provides consistency and promotes the acquisition of same skills, knowledge and behaviours required to ensure equality within learner experience and learner competencies. We would encourage all Pharmacy Technician employees to adhere to the HEE quality framework for consistency of standards monitoring.

4. *What more can be done to ensure all staff, starting from the lowest paid, see a valid and attractive career in the NHS, with identifiable paths and multiple points of entry and choice?*

APTUK response

APTUK support the need for the development of a career pathway to provide a clear developmental pathway for Pharmacy Technicians from initial education through to foundation and advanced practice. This could be in the form of a step wise model with clearly defined progression gateways for all pharmacy specialisms and sectors. This would also include relevant return to practice pathways etc for Pharmacy Technicians wishing to take a career break. The pathway



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should provide clear guidance on education and training needs and opportunities and link with Foundation and Advanced practice frameworks.

The UEA research 'Identifying the Role of the Pharmacy Technician' September 2016 supports this, as one of the recommendations from this study was to 'Develop a post-registration career framework to provide a career structure for registered PTs'.

APTUK see this as an objective of the professional leadership body and would welcome collaboration with HEE in developing career pathways inclusive of human factors capability.

The document states that by 2027 there will be 45,000 qualified nursing associates, with an expected 17,000 of these staffs having completed additional training to become registered nurses by this date. APTUK would like to know what, if any, proposals are being reviewed to extend this to Pharmacy and in particular to Pharmacy Technicians; career escalator to train Pharmacy Technicians to Pharmacists within a flexible work based education and development model akin to other healthcare professions.

Remuneration is also an important consideration, particularly at entry point in the future, if apprenticeship wages rather than AfC pay scales are to be employed across the England geography. There is an unintended consequence that this may reduce the quality of entrants into the profession. Currently experienced pharmacy assistants and graduates are attracted and recruited into the Pre-registration Trainee Pharmacy Technician posts. This may change and be prohibitive if an apprenticeship wage is introduced across the profession.

APTUK support HEEs approach to developing quality principles that guide employers, STPs, and LWABs in the development of apprenticeships to provide career pathways aligned to recruitment and retention strategies.

As applied values based recruitment is seen to attract and recruit students, trainees and employees on the basis of their values and behaviours being aligned with the values of the NHS Constitution, APTUK would support this approach for recruiting entrants into the profession. We



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would also support the application of a model akin to the 'Preregistration Pharmacist Professional Attributes Framework' and would welcome collaboration in its development.

The document cites that relative low pay resulting from industry structure, low productivity and funding issues is associated with low levels of learning and development, and high turnover. Thus, remuneration is also an important consideration to retain staff, specifically Pharmacy Technicians, as roles expand and include additional responsibilities and accountabilities.

5. *How can we better ensure the health system meets the needs and aspirations of all communities in England?*

APTUK response

Pharmacy Technicians already support carers, self-carers and volunteers with their knowledge of medication and devices. Recognition of this valuable work and extra funding for more Pharmacy Technicians could provide better support to these service users. Collaborative working within MDTs to identify where support is needed would be beneficial to NHS service users.

Social Prescribing is a relatively modern concept which encourages primary care services to refer patients with **social**, emotional or practical needs to a range of local, non-clinical services, often provided by the voluntary and community sector. We believe that the Pharmacy Technician workforce is ideally placed to support this workstream, and that training should be provided to facilitate this.

6. *What does being a modern, model employer mean to you and how can we ensure the NHS meets those ambitions?*

APTUK response

APTUK recognises that having the right mix of competencies and skills across a team improves outcomes for patients, and improves clinical productivity.

The document cites that clinicians often, 'act down' in their day to day work in order to ensure patients receive the highest standards of care – but this should not be the norm. A broad multi-



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disciplinary team, well supported by non-clinical staff, should mean every professional works across their whole scope of practice and displays the full range of their capabilities, skills and knowledge.

APTUK strongly support this and for Pharmacy this is about utilising the pharmacy team to its capacity. This specifically for Pharmacy Technicians is in the context of their professional registration, skills, knowledge and experience. APTUK encourages Pharmacy Technicians to 'work to the top of their licence', which means that they work in the team and practice to the full extent of their education and training, instead of spending time doing something that could effectively and safely be carried out by someone else who is suitably trained and competent.

The UEA research 'Identifying the Role of the Pharmacy Technician' September 2016 identified that Pharmacy Technicians perceived that there is a generally a lack of understanding of their role by all healthcare professionals including pharmacist. This was seen as a major barrier to the development of the role as a profession.

APTUK ask that consideration is given to how the inter-professional working relationships and learning with pharmacists can be enhanced both pre and post-registration to ensure that the contribution of both healthcare professionals is optimised in delivering the FYFV.

Innovation in all technological and other developments, such as genomics, pharmaceutical advances, artificial intelligence, digital and robotics are likely to change pharmacy systems over the next two decades and the current Pharmacy Technician workforce will require training and development and lifelong learning to support any changes in service delivery. To retain staff it is important that no one is left behind and APTUK consider that advances in technology and medicines should be included in structured Foundation and Advanced programmes.

Advancements in genomics and the move from a 'one size fits all' approach to treatment, towards personalised, or precision, medicine will impact on pharmacy. Pharmacy Technicians, alongside Pharmacists, will have an important role to play when genomic medicine goes mainstream.



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APTUK raises that Pharmacy Technicians, enabling them to support this innovative, will need upskilling to embrace genomic therapies linked to their medicines optimisation roles and as gate keepers of medicines and patient safety. We consider that learning akin to the HEE Genomics Education Programme being developed should extend to Pharmacy Technicians.

7. *Do you have any comments on how we can ensure that our NHS staff make the greatest possible difference to delivering excellent care for people in England?*

APTUK response

APTUK believe that the knowledge and skills of Pharmacy Technicians can be further enhanced to improve NHS services, and recognises that Regulation, upskilling and advanced clinical practises are vital to improving skill mix. The skills of Pharmacy Technicians are already being utilised within Multidisciplinary Teams and this area of work is expanding.

Pharmacy Technicians skills can be utilised to support National programs such the Medicines Value Programme to improve health outcomes from medicines and ensure we are getting the best value from the NHS medicines bill. Their work directly supports one of the aims of the programme which is to support people to take their medicines as intended, with appropriate medicines reviews, so that they get the health outcomes they want.

Pharmacy Technician workstreams are reflective of the NHS's 10 point efficiency plan as outlined in next steps in the Five Year Forward Plan: point 4. Medicines and Pharmacy. Priorities of the plan are Cancer; Mental Health; Urgent and Emergency Care; Maternity; and Primary Care and Pharmacy Technicians provide pharmacy services to each area as follows.

- Cancer, Pharmacy Technicians prepare Chemotherapy regimens, dispense oral chemotherapy and counsel patients/carers on the use of this medication.
- Mental Health – Pharmacy Technicians manage Clozapine dispensing services, dispense medication, and advise patients/carers on the use of these.
- Pharmacy Technicians provide support to urgent care centres emergency care and Maternity services by providing ward based pharmacy services.



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- Pharmacy Technicians within Primary Care are taking on more diverse roles, and supporting the NHS England Clinical Pharmacists in GP practice pilot being undertaken currently, in addition to other roles

APTUK will support the development of an advanced training framework to upskill the Pharmacy Technicians workforce to undertake new roles, providing relevant training and assessment criteria has been set. We propose that Pharmacy Technicians can be involved throughout a patient journey and believe educational course content should reflect this. We will support the review of legislation to enable Pharmacy Technicians to be able to administer medications under a PGD, eg flu vaccinations, and would welcome training on new ways of working, for examples Venepuncture training, Immunisation training, and pharmacy technicians carrying out tests currently being carried out by Health Care Assistants. This would support allied healthcare professionals and free up time for care.

Professional leadership is essential in any profession and we would welcome funding for the development of Pharmacy Technician Clinical Fellows, or equivalent to, so to provide equal leadership opportunities akin to other professionals.

Please do not hesitate to contact APTUK if any further information is required or if any aspects of this response require further clarification.

On behalf of APTUK

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