Technician Mentorship Resource Guide

This resource was prepared by the ASHP Section of Pharmacy Practice
Leaders Advisory Group on New and Emerging Leaders

Contact: info@pharmtechsociety.org

Introduction/Background

As the pharmacy profession continues to advance and evolve in services and skills, pharmacy technicians must also continue to grow and advance in their practice. Furthermore, amid ongoing technician shortages, fostering a culture that values continuous development is essential for improving technician retention and sustaining a resilient workforce.

In the 2022 PTCB Pharmacy Technician Workforce Survey that surveyed greater than 20,000 pharmacy technicians, 59% of technicians considered being a pharmacy technician as their long-term career with 61% of certified technicians getting certification in order to seek career-advancement.[1] In a 2023 survey of 1386 technicians in Ohio, guidance or mentorship from peer technicians (46%) ranked in the top 3 most helpful tools to prepare pharmacy technicians for their current roles.[2]

Based on technician perceptions in these surveys, it is evident that institutions must prioritize maintaining a strong technician pipeline by offering career development opportunities that engage, motivate, and inspire technicians to pursue ongoing professional growth and advancement.

Advancing Technician Career Roles/Specialization

As pharmacy technician roles continue to evolve beyond traditional distributive functions, more technicians are advancing into specialized roles that support both administrative operations and direct patient care. These expanded responsibilities reflect the changing landscape of pharmacy practice, where technicians are increasingly recognized as critical contributors to health system efficiency, safety, and innovation.

In recent years, more technicians have pursued advanced credentials to expand their roles and responsibilities, many of which are listed on the PTCB Credentials webpage.[3] These include:
- Certified Compounded Sterile Preparation Technician® (CSPT®)
- Medication History Certificate
- Hazardous Drug Management Certificate
- Immunization Administration Certificate

These credentials support new opportunities, from managing compounding workflows to administering vaccines while empowering technicians to practice at the top of their scope.

Technicians are also stepping into advanced roles in administration, such as:
- Pharmacy Systems Administrator
- Automation Coordinator
- Inventory Supervisor
- Compliance Specialist

These roles often involve collaboration with IT, nursing, and operations teams to optimize medication-use systems and support high-level decision-making.[3]

Additional Specialized Pharmacy Technician Roles:

As healthcare demands evolve, more technicians are stepping into highly specialized roles that require advanced training, certifications, or institutional onboarding. Examples include:

- **Nuclear Pharmacy Technician:**
    - Prepares and handles radiopharmaceuticals used in diagnostic imaging and cancer treatment. This role demands specialized training in radiation safety, sterile compounding, and compliance with USP <825>.[4]
- **Controlled Substance Auditor (CSA Technician):**
    - Focuses on inventory control, auditing, and diversion prevention for controlled substances. These technicians conduct internal audits, track discrepancies, and ensure DEA regulatory compliance.[5]
- **Pharmacy Buyer or Inventory Analyst:**
    - Manages purchasing, inventory levels, vendor contracts, and shortage mitigation. Technicians in these roles ensure formulary alignment and optimize cost savings.[5]
- **Pharmacy Automation or Informatics Technician:**
    - Supports implementation, maintenance, and optimization of pharmacy automation systems (e.g., carousels, ADCs, packaging devices), sometimes collaborating with IT to improve data flow and system functionality.[5]
- **Patient Care/Medication History Technician:**
    - Obtains accurate medication histories and allergy documentation at the point of care, often embedded in Emergency Departments or pre-op clinics to improve reconciliation efforts.[6]
- **Specialty Pharmacy Technician:**
    - Navigates high-cost medication access, benefit investigations, and coordination of care for chronic or rare disease treatments.[5]

The Organizational Impact of Specialization:

Health systems that invest in technician career ladders and specialization programs see clear benefits:[7]

- Increased job satisfaction and retention
- Greater engagement in quality improvement efforts
- More peer-to-peer mentorship and leadership participation
- Improved pharmacy operations and interdepartmental coordination

In addition to formal advancement, empowering technicians to participate in decision-making, lead training, and serve on safety or operations committees enhances team culture and demonstrates that their voices are valued.

Ultimately, technician specialization is not just about professional development but a strategic investment in workforce resilience and sustainable healthcare delivery.

Mentorship Principles and Overcoming Challenges

Successful mentorship focuses on the growth of the mentee. As a mentorship relationship is formed, it is important that the mentee's short- and long-term goals, desires, strengths, flaws, and interests are understood, and clear expectations are set (see "Mentor/Mentee Questions & Expectation-Setting"). However, the mentor does not need to be all-knowing or have expert-level knowledge of various topics, but rather, act as a guide and resource to help the mentee learn, seek opportunities, and reflect on their practices. The mentee should be proactive in their communication and outreach in order to make the most out of the relationship. The mentee can prepare for conversations by bringing questions, sharing knowledge, and other information that can help the mentor guide them where needed. Understanding how to navigate the mentorship relationship effectively and confidently can enhance both personal and professional development and foster a culture of continuous learning and collaboration in pharmacy.

When serving as a mentee or mentor for the first time, one may face several initial challenges, including[8]:
- **Understanding individual needs:** Each mentee has unique goals and challenges.
  - *Tips to manage this:*
    - In the first meeting, outline both your goals and your mentee's goals to establish clear expectations.
- **Balancing roles:** Taking on mentorship responsibilities in addition to one's primary job may feel overwhelming at first.
  - *Tips to manage this:*
    - Prioritize your time by scheduling meetings with your mentee in advance.
    - During the first meeting, agree on a meeting frequency that is manageable for both the mentor and mentee but still ensures that the mentee feels adequately supported.
- **Being aware of new dynamics:** Mentorship relationships can produce a power dynamic that mentors should be mindful of.
  - *Tips to manage this:*
    - Foster a safe space by encouraging open communication that allows for honest dialogue, mutual respect, and two-way constructive feedback.
    - Clarify the mentor's willingness to serve as a confidant for the mentee but recognize that they might not always be comfortable sharing.[9] Consider sharing or discussing other resources or support networks that the mentee can turn to when needed.
    - The mentor should practice active listening. Be mindful not to dominate conversations or talk over the mentee.[9]
- **Cultivating the relationship:** With any new relationship, it can take time to build trust and formulate natural conversations.
  - *Tips to manage this:*
    - Prepare for meetings by having discussion questions, activities, or an informal agenda planned ahead of time.
    - Suggested activities include: reviewing a mentee's SMART goals, reviewing a CV or letter of intent, or conducting a mock interview.[10]
    - Potential discussion topics include: goals for the mentorship relationship, past experiences with mentorship, professional/career development and career path interests, short and long-term career goals, and work-life integration strategies.[11]

- **Combatting impostor syndrome:** New mentors may initially experience self-doubt or feel unqualified to guide others effectively.
  - o *Tips to manage this[12, 13]:*
    - ▪ Mentors should remind themselves that learning is a lifelong process. No one knows everything, and feeling some uncertainty in new situations is normal.
    - ▪ Recognize the value of one's knowledge and experiences. Take time to reflect on one's own experiences (e.g., job experiences, successful projects or presentations, additional training or certifications, challenges that one has overcome) and the lessons learned from them.
    - ▪ For areas or situations that a mentor does not have experience in, it is okay to explore ideas together with your mentee, utilize external resources, or seek advice from other professionals.

Creating a Formal Mentorship Program For Technicians

To create a formal mentorship program, you must first set up mentor-mentee matching in a way that allows these organic conversations to take place.

Develop a Matching Framework:

Design a standardized process to collect and evaluate data about mentors and mentees, including:
- **Career goals:** Document mentees' aspirations, such as obtaining certifications, transitioning to leadership roles, or mastering specialized skills.
- **Technical expertise:** Identify mentors' areas of expertise, such as sterile compounding, inventory management, automation, and leadership.
- **Certifications and experience:** Gather details about credentials (e.g., CPhT, CSPT) and years of experience to ensure relevant pairings.
- **Personal interests:** Include hobbies or non-professional interests to foster rapport and strengthen the relationship.

Conduct Comprehensive Surveys:

Market the significance of having a pharmacy technician mentorship program so mentors participate willingly, use a platform that simplifies sign-up (e.g., online survey), and collect information from interested individuals. For each mentee and mentor participating, it should be required to provide pertinent information about each individual. This will allow administrators of the matching process to match mentees with mentors that are most likely to serve as a good resource. For example:
- **Mentee Survey:** length in practice, past education, self-identified areas for improvement, career goals/practice interest(s), desired meeting frequency, desired meeting platform, preferred mentor qualities
- **Mentor Survey:** length in practice, areas of expertise, past education, certifications, time availability, desired meeting frequency, desired meeting platform, preferred number of mentees, and any other preferences for mentees

Utilize Matching Tools & Making Pairs:

Use HR software, professional development platforms, or custom databases to manage profiles and streamline the pairing process.
- Larger programs may benefit from algorithm-based tools to ensure fairness and efficiency.
- For smaller programs, manual pairings through spreadsheets can still be effective and personal.

Pair participants based on shared goals, complementary skills, and relevant experience. Options include matching junior staff with experienced mentors or using a peer-mentorship model for technicians with similar tenure.

Initial Meetings & Ongoing Guidance:

Mentorship programs can help support their pairings by providing suggested directions (e.g., who should set up the initial meeting), discussion topics, activities, and/or questions. Programs should support mentor-mentee relationships with structure and flexibility, but ensure that pairings have[15]:
- Defined shared goals
- Established preferred communication styles and meeting frequency
- Clarified roles and expectations to maintain professionalism

Creating the Discussion:
Mentor/Mentee Questions and Conversations

Building on the foundational mentorship principles and the importance of technician advancement, this section offers practical tools and conversation starters for establishing strong mentor-mentee relationships.

A successful mentorship begins with intentional conversations that help both mentor and mentee align on purpose, expectations, and shared commitment. The goal is to establish a clear understanding of what each person hopes to gain from the relationship and how that can be achieved through mutual engagement.

Whether you're launching a formal mentorship or developing an organic connection, these early discussions are critical for building trust and setting the tone.[14]

How to Start the Conversation:

To create an open, safe space for meaningful dialogue, we recommend the mentor initiate the first conversation by asking the mentee about their current role, recent challenges, and career aspirations. Mentees can come prepared with a few thoughts or questions that they hope to explore.

Start with a warm, open-ended approach[14]:
- "Tell me about what drew you to pharmacy and what you enjoy most about your current role."
- "Are there any particular challenges you're navigating right now?"
- "What would success look like for you in this mentorship?"

Key Questions for Mentees to Reflect On and Discuss:

These questions can help mentees articulate their goals and give mentors direction for support[15]:
- What short-term skills are you hoping to build or strengthen?
- Are you interested in certifications or advanced roles? If so, which ones?
- Where do you see yourself in 1, 3, or 5 years?
- What barriers have prevented you from pursuing certain goals so far?
- What do you need more exposure to (e.g., automation, sterile compounding, inventory, leadership)?
- Have you had a mentor before? What worked well, or didn't?

Key Questions for Mentors to Ask:

These can guide the mentor in tailoring their guidance[3]:
- How do you prefer to communicate? Email, text, video calls? How often would you like to meet?
- Do you feel supported in your current role?
- How do you learn best? Through reading, shadowing, hands-on experience?
- What motivates you, and what keeps you engaged at work?
- What's one professional accomplishment you're proud of?
- What kind of feedback or guidance are you hoping for from me?

Setting Shared Expectations and Goals:

Establishing mutual expectations early helps keep the relationship structured and intentional. Consider drafting a mentorship agreement or outlining a roadmap during your initial meetings. Together, identify[2]:
- **Frequency of check-ins**: Biweekly? Monthly? Quarterly? Be flexible but consistent.
- **Preferred communication style/platform**: E.g., in-person meetings, virtual meetings, emails, texts or informal chats
- **Short-term goals**: E.g., complete certification, exam, shadow a buyer role, explore the medication reconciliation process
- **Long-term goals**: E.g., step into a leadership role, lead a project, present at a professional conference
- **Boundaries & respect**: Set realistic time commitments and expectations for responsiveness.
- **Feedback loop**: Encourage regular feedback on how the mentorship is going and how to adjust moving forward.

Tools to Support the Relationship[15]:

Tools can help provide structure to outlining, tracking, and supporting goals; these include:
- **Career Development Plan (CDP)**: A living document to outline goals, track progress, and support discussion
- **Checklists or milestone trackers**: Celebrate achievements and keep momentum
- **Shared resource folder**: Include articles, resources on certifications, contacts, or relevant tools discussed in mentorship meetings

The goal isn't to perfect everything overnight, but to ensure every technician feels seen, supported, and inspired to grow. Asking the right questions and setting the right foundation can transform mentorship into a powerful catalyst for both personal and professional advancement.[7]

Maintaining Engagement and an Ongoing Mentorship Relationship

Achieving a successful mentoring relationship depends on trust, communication, and a shared commitment to professional growth. To develop and sustain a meaningful mentorship with your mentee/mentor, it is essential to foster an ongoing relationship that is both supportive and encouraging. Here are some key strategies for maintaining a strong, engaged mentorship relationship:

Provide Regular Check-ins:

Mentoring is a continuous process, not a one-off event. It's important to schedule regular check-ins to track progress, address any challenges, and celebrate successes. Early on, these check-ins may need to be more frequent as the relationship builds, but as the mentoring bond strengthens, they can become less frequent. Meeting face-to-face (whether in-person or virtual) can also help to build the relationship. Each session should go beyond just technical skills, also focusing on the mentee's personal growth and long-term career goals. Maintaining regular check-ins helps keep the mentorship dynamic, ensuring that both the mentor and mentee stay engaged and communication remains open. Create tools such as a career development plan to provide structure, helping the mentee identify their career path, set actionable goals, and track progress.[16] This tool serves as a roadmap to guide discussions, ensuring that the mentee's professional development stays on track while fostering a deeper sense of commitment and motivation throughout the mentorship journey. Regular updates to the CDP also allow the relationship to evolve with the mentee's changing needs and aspirations.

Consistently Adapt to the Mentee's Needs:

Each pharmacy technician has their own set of challenges and goals, which may evolve over time. It's important to remain flexible and adaptable in your approach to mentorship. Customize your approach as needed depending on the goal so that the mentee feels recognized and supported in their unique journey. Examples include adjusting your feedback frequency, asking the mentee to provide feedback on the mentoring process itself, staying open to change and identifying shifts in goals as the relationship develops. Likewise, provide constructive feedback on their performance, always framing it in a way that fosters growth rather than discouragement.

Recognize and Celebrate Milestones:

As your mentee progresses, acknowledge their achievements—both big and small. Recognizing milestones, such as mastering a new skill or improving in a certain area, boosts confidence and reinforces their commitment to the mentorship process. Celebrate these moments, whether through a verbal acknowledgment or by helping them set new goals.

Promote Professional Development Opportunities:

Mentorship should extend beyond routine tasks. Encourage your mentee to pursue opportunities for continued learning, such as attending ASHP conferences, taking the PTCB exam, signing up for ASHP certifications, enrolling in a pharmacy technician associate degree program.[17] By facilitating access to these opportunities, you help ensure that their growth continues beyond the scope of day-to-day responsibilities. Keep an open dialogue about emerging trends in pharmacy practice professional development programs and discuss how these may impact their role. If your healthcare facility offers career ladder progression, take the time to coach your mentee through these opportunities, helping them understand how they can advance within the organization and achieve their career goals.

Be a Source of Support and Guidance:

Remember, mentorship goes beyond technical skill-building. Be a trusted source of emotional and professional support. Be available to listen to challenges, offer advice, or simply provide encouragement during difficult times. Having a mentor who demonstrates care and concern can significantly impact a mentee's job satisfaction and long-term career success.

The Cycles of Mentorship:
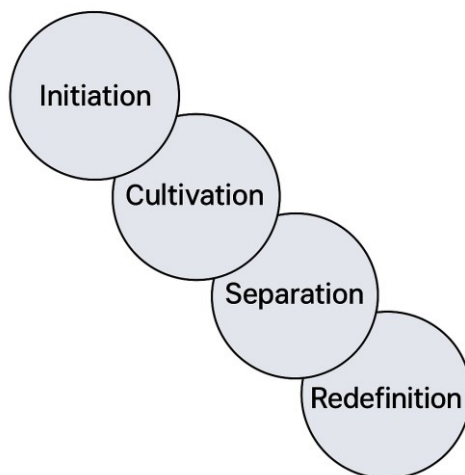
A mentorship relationship can be defined by the following stages[18]:

1. **Initiation**: This phase marks the beginning of the mentoring relationship, where both mentors and mentees establish expectations and take time to understand each other's backgrounds, goals, and needs.
2. **Cultivation**: During this phase, the relationship matures, and mentors offer greater psychosocial and career support, guiding the mentee through challenges, skill development, and growth opportunities.
3. **Separation**: At this stage, mentees begin to seek more autonomy and independence, growing more confident in their abilities and reducing their reliance on the mentor's direct guidance.
4. **Redefinition**: In this final phase, the relationship evolves into a more peer-like dynamic, with the mentor and mentee continuing to interact in a different capacity or concluding the formal mentorship altogether.

The mentorship journey—spanning initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition—is not a linear process but a dynamic cycle that reflects the evolving nature of professional growth. Each completed mentorship relationship has the potential to inspire the next, with mentees becoming future mentors, and leaders emerging from within the technician workforce itself. By embracing this cycle and fostering a culture rooted in support, opportunity, and shared purpose, we create a sustainable and continuous pipeline of pharmacy technicians who are empowered to grow, specialize, and lead—ultimately strengthening the future of pharmacy practice.

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