

Leadership, Learning and Giving Back

PACE ASSESSORS SHARE WHAT THEY OFFERED AND GAINED

By Stuart Foxman

For three weeks, Kalpesh Chauhan, R.Ph. was a fly on the wall in his own Shoppers Drug Mart in Brampton. While an international pharmacy graduate from India practised there, Chauhan simply observed and assessed. He likened the experience to a driving test. During driving lessons, an instructor teaches and offers feedback. But when it's time to see if a license is deserved, the examiner sits in the passenger seat and watches.

Chauhan volunteered to help with the initial test of the new PACE program. PACE stands for Practice Assessment of Competence at Entry. The College is

piloting this approach to measure applicants' readiness for practice. Eventually, PACE will replace the College's current Structured Practical Training (SPT) program as the entry-to-practice requirement for all applicants.

As one of the pharmacists involved in what was essentially a pre-pilot of the PACE assessment model, Chauhan welcomed this opportunity to give back to the profession.

"We have an obligation, as members of a self-regulated profession, to protect the public," he says.



"We do that every day in our own practice, and as assessors we can do so by ensuring that the candidates who follow in our footsteps are competent to practice."

As PACE is introduced, what's involved in being an assessor, and what do pharmacists gain from their involvement? We talked to three pharmacists who shared their experiences from the pre-pilot.

First, a brief look at PACE. The goal is to ensure a consistent approach to assessing readiness for practice for domestic and international pharmacy graduates. PACE focuses on a candidate's ability to demonstrate entry-to-practice competencies in a practice setting.

In the SPT model, candidates came in for 12 weeks, allowing the pharmacy to supplement staffing and provide coaching/training. PACE is purely a short-term assessment, with coaching/training not part of the process. Instead, College-trained and -appointed assessors use direct observation of the candidate over a specified period – 70 hours over two weeks (full-time) or three weeks (part-time).

The completed assessment goes to the College where a standardized scoring rubric is applied. This determines if the candidate has demonstrated their competence or requires additional development.

PACE relies on volunteer assessors – practicing community or hospital pharmacists who'll observe a minimum of three candidates per year.

Antoinette Duronio, R.Ph. found the PACE assessment model to be much less labour-intensive than the SPT process. "You're just there to observe, so the pharmacist you're assessing is doing the work. The time passed very quickly," says Duronio, Clinical Pharmacy Manager and Residency Coordinator at Windsor General Hospital.

ASSESSORS SUPPORT THE PROFESSION BUT LEARN TOO

PACE assessors are leaders within the profession, committed to upholding its standards. Duronio and others who filled the assessor role say they were motivated not only to support their profession but to learn something – about assessments, about the future of the profession, and about themselves as well.

Duronio was mindful that someone's profession and license was on the line. That's a huge responsibility. As she says, pharmacists once volunteered to evaluate her too; without that, she wouldn't be here.

For Chauhan, the assessment wasn't onerous. As a franchise owner, he has responsibilities beyond the dispensary so just had to focus on his time management. But the candidate handled about 75% of the typical tasks of a pharmacist.

Chauhan still took care of some routine duties, but left it to the candidate to attend to all other roles that needed some degree of clinical and therapeutic involvement. He says assessing a candidate was a great opportunity, and can also "open your eyes to new ways of practicing and keep you fresh."

Like Chauhan, Donnie Edwards, R.Ph. carefully studied the candidate in his Boggio & Edwards IDA in Ridgeway. For instance, he noticed how the candidate thought very methodically before talking to patients, wanting to ensure that all points came across. It reminded Edwards that he could sometimes slow down when counselling patients.

"I learn from other pharmacists and students all the time, how they interact with patients and what methods work. That can help me improve my practice too," says Edwards.

When Edwards assessed his candidate, he went through a mental exercise: "Would I hire this person?" That was his gold standard, but as an assessor he knew his task was to help answer another question: "Am I comfortable that this pharmacist is ready to practice today?"

"We want to make this profession better," says Edwards, "and it's students who keep moving us forward." 

PRACTICE TIP!

While pharmacy technicians are not permitted to accept verbal prescriptions for narcotics, they ARE permitted to perform a technical check of narcotic prescriptions. Learn more about pharmacy technicians' scope of practice:

<http://www.ocpinfo.com/practice-education/practice-tools/support-materials/technician-role/>