

# College shifts focus to practice site-based assessments

## **NEW TERMINOLOGY**

**COLLEGE “INSPECTORS”  
ARE NOW CALLED  
“PRACTICE ADVISORS”**

**AND “INSPECTIONS”  
ARE NOW CALLED  
“ASSESSMENTS”**

As the regulatory body for the profession of pharmacy in Ontario, the College’s mandate is to protect the public interest. One of the fundamental ways this is achieved is through a series of quality assurance measures established by the College. These measures ensure that at entry-to-practice — and throughout their careers — pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are competent to deliver safe, effective and ethical pharmacy services. Each practitioner’s competence is evaluated against the established legislation, Standards of Practice and code of ethics relevant to pharmacy practice in Ontario.

Council recently endorsed five new professional responsibility principles that reinforce the College’s practice expectations. The principles are applicable to all pharmacists and pharmacy technicians regardless of role or practice setting, and are reflective of the reality that the healthcare environment and pharmacy practice is continuously evolving.

The principles remind practitioners of their overriding responsibility as regulated healthcare professionals, to uphold their ethical duty to put the best interests of patients first and foremost. Patients trust that their pharmacy practitioners — as the holders of power in the patient-practitioner relationship — will use their knowledge, skills and abilities to make decisions that positively enhance patient health outcomes.

Practicing these professional responsibilities — which reflect practice today and are

supported by the Standards of Practice — requires a conscious shift in a practitioner’s focus from the individual task at hand to the bigger picture of patient-focused care. Members must assert professional judgment to act in the best interest of the patient and balance professional versus organizational responsibilities to ensure the best patient outcomes and safety.

In order to appropriately evaluate and support pharmacists and pharmacy technicians’ efforts in practicing these responsibilities and Standards of Practice, the College also needs to shift its focus.

As part of its current quality assurance measures, the College conducts routine inspections of community pharmacies (diagram 1) – approximately 1,500 per year. These inspections have traditionally focused on assessing pharmacy operations and practice processes and have only indirectly touched on an individual practitioner’s practice. Practice advisors (formerly known as inspectors) evaluate what they

observe against relevant legislation, policies and standards, and outline operational and practice goals for the pharmacy and its practitioners in a “Pharmacy Report”. If there are any issues identified, the designated manager will be required to submit an Action Plan to the practice advisor who may revisit the pharmacy at a later date to follow up.

Over the past several months the College has been developing a new assessment model — the practice site-based assessment — which is an enhancement of the College’s current routine pharmacy inspections and includes an evaluation of an individual practitioner’s performance in their practice site. The new model will allow the College to better evaluate, coach and mentor individual pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to adhere to their professional responsibilities and Standards of Practice.

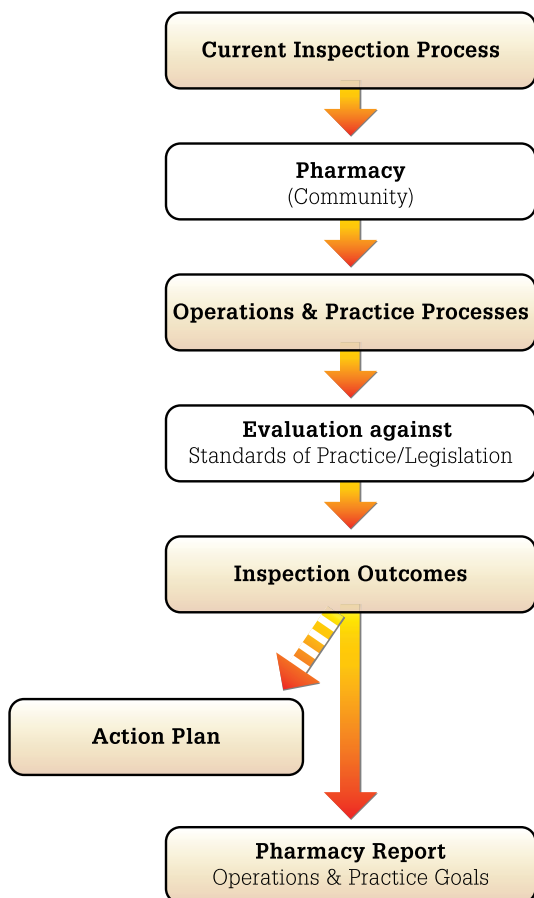
In the new practice assessment model (diagram 2), the assessment is broken into two pieces — the first is similar to the College’s current inspection process and focuses on the operations and practice processes of the pharmacy. The second — and new piece — focuses on the individual practitioner(s) and assesses his or her everyday practice. Practice advisors will focus on identifying and understanding the processes that are in place that shape and support the practitioner’s clinical decision-making. In addition to the “Pharmacy Report” that outlines the operational and practice goals for the pharmacy, each practitioner who has been assessed will receive an “Individual Report” outlining observations made by the practice advisor.

Since it would be impossible to focus on all areas of an individual’s practice during an assessment, an important component in the development of the new practice assessment has been identifying the key areas of focus. Practice advisors will visit the pharmacy and evaluate the process for new prescriptions, refills, adaptations/prescribing and medication reviews. This will allow the practice advisor to assess the practitioner(s) in the following areas:

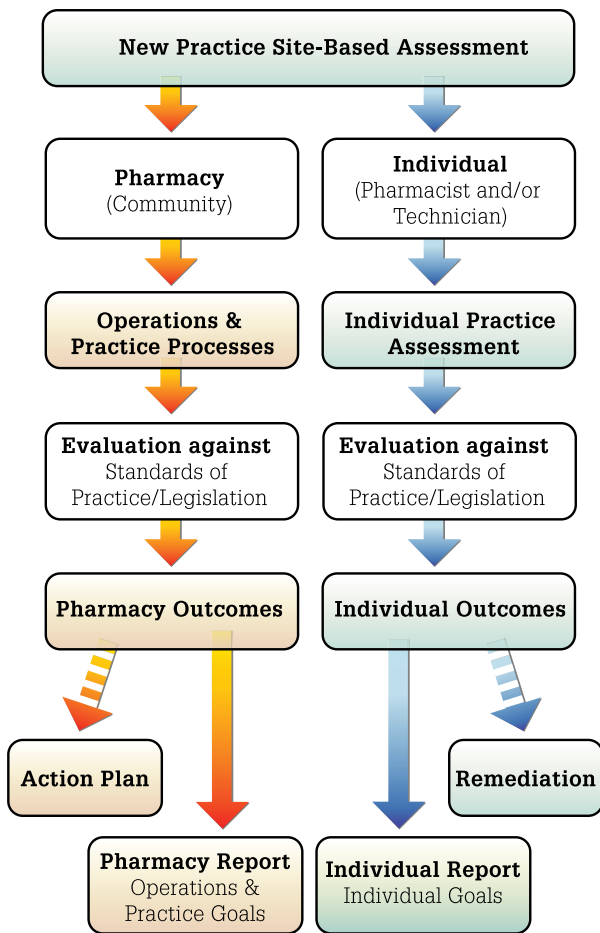
1. Patient assessment
2. Decision making
3. Documentation
4. Communication

In determining these focus areas, the College considered which practice activities have the greatest impact on patient and public safety (diagram 3).

**DIAGRAM 1**



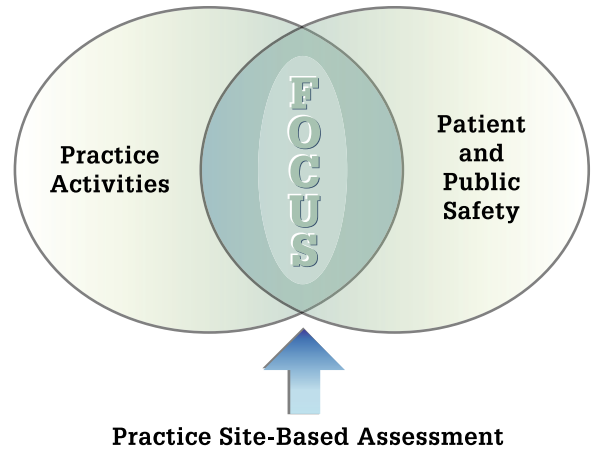
**DIAGRAM 2**



The new practice assessment does not replace any of the College’s formal Quality Assurance Program such as the Peer Review, but does offer a chance for more practitioners to be involved in a quality assurance activity throughout their career. While the Peer Review uses standardized patient interviews with sample cases in a controlled environment, the new practice assessment reviews the practitioner’s actual practice. Assessing practice in this way will provide the College with a relevant and practical means to evaluate practice and — more importantly — coach, and mentor pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to enhance their practice and embrace their professional responsibilities.

Although a significant amount of work has already been done on the development of the new practice site-based assessment model, there is still much more to do before its anticipated launch in early 2015. This fall, newly hired and current practice

**DIAGRAM 3**



advisors will receive extensive training to ensure that their understanding and subsequent application of the assessment tool is applied fairly and consistently amongst the pharmacies and pharmacists and/or pharmacy technicians assessed. Before the end of 2014, the College will test the new practice assessment and learnings will be incorporated into the final assessment model.

It is not revolutionary but rather evolutionary that the College is moving toward a practice site-based assessment as a primary tool for evaluating pharmacists’ and pharmacy technicians’ competence in delivering safe, effective and ethical pharmacy services. The shift supports the role of pharmacists as medication experts and clinical decision-makers and is consistent with other primary healthcare practitioners such as doctors and nurses. A number of other provincial pharmacy regulators across the country have already or are in the process of moving to a more practice-focused assessment or inspection.

It is anticipated that the new assessment model — by providing the College with opportunities to evaluate and mentor actual practice — will increase adherence to practice standards, support practitioners as they practice to their full scope and ultimately assist in the delivery of greater health outcomes to patients.