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Pharmacy Technician

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Pharmacy Technician

The Pharmacy Technician program, originally slated to be called the Pharmacy Technology program, accepted its first class of 17 students in the fall of 2009. A new Iowa state certification was to go into effect in 2010, and this program would be the formal training that would prepare students for that certification. The training, however, is not yet mandatory. The Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB), one of two entities certifying technicians, has set 2020 for the year that a student must graduate from an accredited institution and accredited program before sitting for the exam.

The college was motivated to start the program in response to the growing need for formally trained pharmacy technicians. Previously, the apprentice model was used where students moved from cashier to the pharmacy and gradually developed their skills. However, this led to a great variance in the quality and quantity of training the pharmacy technicians received. The variety in pharmacy technician training models mirrored that of the early medical schools. For example, Drake University had a medical school before the Flexner report changed medical school training, and those students merged with the University of Iowa. By putting training in a community college, students could gain college credit getting them closer to their academic and career goals.

Surveys were sent out to the pharmacy community, and there was a significant agreement that formal training in a community college setting would be well received. An advisory committee was formed and has met bi-annually since before the program was created. The program chair, who has been with DMACC since the summer of 2009, works with the advisory committee to make changes in the program and curriculum that are most relevant to current technician practice.

The market collapse and general economic state of the country in 2008 almost stopped the program from gaining acceptance within the college. It did not make sense to hire new faculty if longer tenured faculty would be lost because of budget cuts. However, the college weathered the economic downturn without such drastic measures and the program began without any delays.

The program's description includes a mission to prepare students for entry-level pharmacy technician positions.

Medical and pharmaceutical terminology will be introduced along with pharmaceutical calculations. The basic anatomy related to the pharmacology of medications will be a major component of the coursework. This program will provide students with the necessary preparatory courses for seeking certification. Certification will require a passing score on a nationally recognized certification exam such as the PTCB (Pharmacy Technician Certification Board) or ExCPT (Exam for the Certification of Pharmacy Technicians).

The advisory committee, made up of local pharmacy leaders from the various chains, hospitals, and associations have been invaluable in leading the technician program's success.

A continuing education program was in place prior to 2009, but this was superseded by the new credit program. Students were interested in moving towards a degree and not just gaining the skills without

the liberal arts breadth provided by such a diploma program. The program was originally based on an accredited program in Illinois; however, the accreditation requirements have since changed and the curriculum will soon change to reflect the current 3rd edition standards.

The DMACC program is the most comprehensive in the state of Iowa with regards to credit hours and provides more experiential learning (240 hours) than any other program in the state. The curricular changes for 2016-2017 will put DMACC in compliance with the model curriculum, and DMACC will likely seek accreditation sometime before 2020; however, that cost is 1/6 of our annual program budget. A group of community colleges is trying to work together to build a collective accredited program with the help of the University of Iowa and Drake University to mitigate this expense.

The program offers a one-year diploma, but many students have gone on to earn their two-year associate's degrees, four-year bachelor's degrees, and the first pharmacy technician graduate to complete a pharmacy doctorate will be coming very soon though many graduates currently attend pharmacy school. The program lasts for three semesters; however, some students have completed it in as few as two semesters, and others have taken a little longer combining the technical preparation with their pre-pharmacy goals.

Tony Guerra, Pharm.D., a Doctor of Pharmacy graduate of DMACC and the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy has chaired and taught all of the didactic courses since the program's inception. However, many volunteer pharmacists have taken on the role of preceptors at local pharmacies including Hy-Vee, Medica, Target, Walgreens Wal-Mart, Ankeny Pharmacy, Mercy Hospital, and Mary Greeley Medical Center. Many of these sites have served to employ the DMACC Pharmacy Technician graduates. In 2014, the Pharmacy Technician program graduated its first honors student who planned to continue her career as a Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT). It is not uncommon for students to embark on careers other than pharmacy within the health professions. Past graduates have gone on to further study in radiographic technology, respiratory therapy, nursing, surgical technology, and others.

All students who have passed the certification exam and have wanted employment have been able to get it in the Des Moines Metro. The further out a student goes into the smaller towns, the more challenging job prospects are; however, demand for DMACC graduates is strong.

In 2010, the program chair removed the option to take COM 703: Communications Skills instead of ENG 105: Composition I and PSY 102 Human and Work Relations instead of PSY 111 Introduction to Psychology and raised the language entrance requirement to match these changes. The next curricular "upheaval" will come in 2015 as the curriculum seeks to follow the 3rd Edition Model Curriculum for Pharmacy Technician Education and Training Programs, a necessary step as the program moves towards national accreditation. SDV 108: The College Experience will also be added as classes get shifted around to help students navigate their options after gaining this practical degree to include options for the completion of a post-diploma A.S. or A.A. degree.

While the pharmacy technician classes are only at the Ankeny campus, students can take all other non-discipline specific courses such as introductory composition and introductory psychology courses at any

campus or online, if available. The program has a fall and spring start, but students can begin non-discipline specific courses in any semester.

Major challenges to the future of the program are a product of the profession itself. There are so many options for a pharmacy technician and pharmacy technician training that questions need to be answered as to the level of education of the faculty, the curriculum for entry-level versus advanced technicians, and the need for certification and/or licensing nationally. DMACC's program chair is working with state leaders to insure that DMACC's program remains consistent with the best programs in the country with an eye towards practical training and long term academic goals.

Created August 2015 in celebration of DMACC's 50th Anniversary.