

Pharmacy Technician Bridging
Education Program

Student Guide

September 2011

Project History

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Effective August 01, 2011, responsibility for administration of the Pharmacy Technician Bridging Education Program was assumed jointly by the Colleges of Pharmacists of Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. Ownership of curriculum materials was transferred by CONNECT Strategic Alliances to these project partners.

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The Pharmacy Technician Bridging Education Program

I. Introduction – Becoming a Registered Pharmacy Technician

This is an exciting time for pharmacy technicians. Regulation of pharmacy technicians has been introduced as a logical step to respond to changes in pharmacy practice. Establishment of a new regulated health profession with consistent competency requirements and standards enables the registered pharmacy technician to perform and be accountable for technical responsibilities associated with pharmacy practice. Regulation of the profession also contributes to enhanced public safety and confidence.

The regulation of pharmacy technicians must be supported by legislative changes in each province. Currently, legislation to establish the new regulated profession of pharmacy technician has been approved by several provincial governments.

Registration Requirements The College of Pharmacists (or pharmacy regulatory authority) in each province is responsible for establishing registration requirements. Current registration requirements for technicians working in community-based and hospital practice settings include a combination of the following:

- Successful completion of the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada (PEBC) Evaluating Examination* (or the Alberta or Ontario College of Pharmacists Certification Exam before 2008)
- Successful completion of the Pharmacy Technician Bridging Education Program
- Successful completion of the PEBC Qualifying Examination
- Successful completion of a provincial jurisprudence examination
- Registration with their provincial College of Pharmacists

(Note: Requirements and completion sequence vary slightly from province to province. Specific details on registration requirements are available on the provincial College of Pharmacists' web site.)

*In Ontario, College of Pharmacists Regulations require that technicians currently working in pharmacy practice who have not graduated from a CCAPP-accredited pharmacy technician program must have successfully completed the PEBC Evaluating Exam by **January 01, 2012 if they wish to pursue registration in Ontario**. In Alberta, technicians currently working in pharmacy practice must complete the Evaluating Exam by Jan. 01, 2014. In British Columbia, current technicians are required to complete registration requirements by the end of 2015.

Bridging Education The Pharmacy Technician Bridging Education Program was developed to assist pharmacy technicians already working in the profession to meet new regulatory requirements and prepare for expanded practice capabilities.** It was carefully designed using the *Professional Competencies for Canadian Pharmacy Technicians at Entry to Practice* developed in 2007 by the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA) as well as other resources. Completion of Bridging Education is a mandatory registration requirement in all provinces currently participating in the regulation initiative.

****Note:** You need to understand that bridging courses are not intended as direct and exclusive preparation for the PEBC Qualifying Exam. If, in the course of your Bridging Program studies, you uncover areas where further study and preparation are needed, it is your responsibility to address those weaknesses prior to attempting the national exam.

The program was developed and introduced in Ontario in 2008. It has since been adapted for use in Alberta and British Columbia with delivery initiated in those provinces in 2010.

Currently, pharmacy regulatory authorities from several provinces are working under the NAPRA umbrella to create a generic curriculum that will meet the needs of pharmacy technicians across Canada who are interested in registration. The ultimate goal is a national regulation strategy that will enable registered pharmacy technicians to be able to re-locate and work anywhere in Canada, without the need to re-qualify. Delivery partners for Pharmacy Technician Bridging Education include the College of Pharmacists in all the participating provinces and publicly-funded colleges and/or universities in each province.

II. Pharmacy Technician Bridging Education

A. Program Structure

The program addresses requirements for expanded practice in both community and hospital pharmacy settings, and includes the following **four courses**:

Professional Practice for Pharmacy Technician Bridging (39 - 45 Hours)

Students will be prepared for entry to practice in five main areas of focus: legal requirements, scope of practice, ethical principles, professionalism and communication skills. Through a variety of learning tools such as interactive case studies, assignments, quizzes and group work, the student will enhance his/her ability to practice competently within the professional practice framework. (*Course hours vary from province to province.)

Product Preparation for Pharmacy Technician Bridging (33 hours)

This course addresses the theoretical knowledge and practical skills essential for safe and accurate preparation of sterile and non-sterile pharmaceutical products. For non-sterile preparation, students will focus on compounding practices for various internal and external preparations and specialty dosage forms, equipment and tools, professional guidelines, standards and legislation, pharmaceutical calculations, and documentation requirements. For sterile product preparation, areas of emphasis include infection control, aseptic technique, parenteral dosage forms, accurate calculations, appropriate use of equipment, and quality control. Best practices associated with the preparation of TPN and antineoplastics are also covered.

Pharmacology for Pharmacy Technician Bridging (33 hours)

This course provides a practical, applied approach to pharmacology. Through a variety of learning tools such as assignments, quizzes, case studies and group work, the

student will enhance his/her ability to practice competently and contribute to a safe patient care setting. Participants will gain basic knowledge related to the pharmacological uses of drugs within a variety of commonly encountered medical conditions.

Management of Drug Distribution Systems for Pharmacy Technician Bridging (39 hours)

This course will examine various drug distribution systems in pharmacy practice, and prepare learners to effectively manage operations in different practice settings to ensure safe and effective drug supply and distribution. Learners will explore distributive functions in institutional settings, as well as common drug plans and their formularies, adjudication challenges, inventory management elements and common business practices. Accurate product release within the parameters of the pharmacy technician role receives special emphasis.

You are not required to complete the 4 courses in any particular order, but it is recommended that the Professional Practice course be completed either as a first course or early in the program since it provides a solid foundation for the rest of the Bridging Program study.

NOTE: The time allocations identified above reference the actual hours of instruction that are provided in traditional classroom delivery. They do NOT represent the total time commitment expected of students in the Bridging Program. Each of the courses in both traditional and online delivery includes readings and assignments that must be completed as 'homework'. You can expect to spend a minimum of 3 hours weekly completing assignments and preparing for the next class. In addition, some courses and individual lessons are considerably more demanding and as a result, will require time commitments that exceed this estimate.

As noted above, the 'course hours' are a standard that applies to traditional delivery and have no direct reference to online courses. Success in the online version of the Bridging Program requires a time commitment that matches or at times exceeds expectations for students enrolled in traditional classroom courses.

Please keep these requirements in mind as you register for Bridging Education courses. Most participants find it best to register for only one course each semester.

Additional Bridging Program Requirement

Following successful completion of the *Management of Drug Distribution Systems* course and prior to registration, you are required to demonstrate proficiency in product release (specifically, independent final check) by completing a supervised, practical evaluation in the workplace. This component of the program is managed by the provincial Colleges of Pharmacists. Please consult your College of Pharmacists' web site regarding the specific requirements for that component of the program.

B. Eligibility for Bridging Education

Completion of the Bridging Education Program is **mandatory** to satisfy registration requirements with the Colleges of Pharmacists participating in this regulation initiative.

To be eligible for Bridging Education, you must meet the criteria established by PEBC - specifically a minimum of 2000 hours worked in 'pharmacy practice' in the past 3 years. (The PEBC web site (www.pebc.ca) provides more information on the specific duties defined as "pharmacy practice".)

If you want to become a Registered Pharmacy Technician, you must successfully complete the PEBC Pharmacy Technician Evaluating Exam (or prior to the end of 2008 the Alberta or Ontario Certification Exam.) **Note: You will not be allowed to sit the PEBC Qualifying Exam, without providing proof of successful completion of either an authorized provincial certification exam or the PEBC Evaluating Exam.**

The order in which you complete the various steps to registration varies slightly from province to province. In Ontario, you must have successfully completed either the OCP Certification Exam or the PEBC Evaluating Exam **before** you enroll in Bridging Education. The Ontario College of Pharmacists will **not** recognize completion of any Bridging Program courses by technicians who have not completed either the provincial Certification exam or the PEBC Evaluating exam by January 01, 2012. In other provinces, you may enroll in Bridging Education before having completed the Evaluating Exam.

Note:

- 1) Completion of the Bridging Education program is not required to sit the PEBC Qualifying Examination; however, it is strongly recommended that you complete the Bridging Education program **before** attempting the PEBC Qualifying Examination, since the Bridging Education Program specifically addresses the expanded scope of practice for regulated pharmacy technicians.
- 2) If you are a graduate of a full-time CCAPP-accredited Pharmacy Technician diploma program (2008 and on), you are exempt from the requirement to complete the Bridging program and the provincial certification exam or PEBC Evaluating Exam. However, you may choose to take one or more courses in the Bridging Education program to upgrade your skills before you sit the PEBC Qualifying Examination. Note: This option is not available in British Columbia; Bridging courses are restricted to individuals following the current technician path.
- 3) Other registration requirements and/or eligibility restrictions apply, but vary slightly from province to province. Consult the provincial College of Pharmacists' web site for more information.

C. Course Evaluation

The Course Outline for each of the courses clearly identifies how your progress in the course will be assessed, when you are required to submit the specific evaluation and its value in the overall evaluation plan for the course. Each course includes a final exam.

1) What mark do I need to achieve to pass each of the Bridging courses?

To successfully complete each Bridging course, you must achieve an overall average of 70% with a minimum of 70% in the final exam.

2) How will my final grade be recorded?

Each of the educational institutions involved in delivery of Bridging Education must use a **Pass/Fail or Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory** transcript notation to indicate students' performance in each course. You will need to provide your College of Pharmacists with Pass/Fail documentation as evidence of successful completion of the Bridging Program registration requirement.

You will not receive final grades expressed as percentages or letter grades. The results of your final exam will also be expressed using the Pass/Fail or Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory notation. However, your professor may use percentage or letter grades to indicate your performance in tests and/or assignments throughout the course.

3) What happens if I fail a Bridging course?

In most situations, you will be required to repeat the course. Supplemental examinations will not be provided. This is a consistent delivery policy for Bridging Education that overrides policies established by individual delivery colleges/universities.

If you fail a Bridging course, you should consult with your professor to review your performance in the final exam and determine your areas of weakness. Based on this feedback you may decide that it is feasible to attempt PLAR as a strategy to earn credit for the failed course. As indicated in section C above, however, you can only make use of PLAR if you can demonstrate that you have done remedial work to address the weaknesses that led to your failing grade. Please keep in mind that you are allowed only one PLAR Challenge per course, so you need to ensure that you are fully prepared before you attempt to gain credit for a course using this approach.

Please note as well that a fee applies for PLAR, even if you have previously paid tuition fees for a course.

4) What happens if I miss a final exam?

If you miss a Final Examination because of illness or family emergency, you must provide your professor with medical or other appropriate documentation validating your absence within two business days of the date of the exam. In addition, you must make arrangements with the course faculty to write the missed examination before results are released to the other students in the course. No concessions will be made for missed examinations that result from situations other than illness family emergency.

Failure to comply with these requirements within the time specified will result in a course failure.

5) Will I be able to keep copies of tests and examinations administered during the course?

You will not be allowed to take home copies of any tests or examinations administered during the course. If the class schedule accommodates another meeting following the examination, your professor can distribute your exam for discussion and review but must collect it again at the end of class. If the final exam is administered during the last class, the faculty member has a responsibility to discuss examination results with you if you request feedback, but again, you will not be allowed to retain your exam copy. This approach is required to maintain some degree of integrity for the examination process, when evaluation materials are limited.

D. Your Responsibilities as a Bridging Program Student

In pursuing Bridging Education, you are expected to demonstrate a level of professionalism and integrity appropriate for an individual interested in becoming a registered health professional. As a result, it is expected that your conduct as a student in a course offered in the classroom or online will demonstrate your commitment to the ethics and standards of your profession. Specific responsibilities include but are not limited to the following:

- **Active participation in course activities and discussions** The effectiveness of the learning experience in a traditional or virtual classroom is enhanced considerably by the level of exchange among students and between the students and the faculty member. You have valuable experience and skills to contribute. Please remember that you will enhance your own learning and the value that your fellow students derive from the learning experience by freely sharing your opinions, perspectives and experiences.
- **Regular Attendance** Attendance is mandatory for Bridging courses; you must comply with the policy that is presented on each Bridging Course outline.

- **Respectful and courteous behavior** It is acknowledged that participation in Bridging Education requires a significant contribution of time and resources by busy individuals. There may be times when you feel less than committed to your Bridging Education study. In spite of these feelings, however, your interactions with fellow students and your instructor should at all times be considerate and professional and designed to contribute to a positive environment for learning and sharing.
- **Commitment to ethics and integrity** The goal of Bridging Education is to prepare pharmacy technicians already in the workplace for an enhanced scope of practice and the responsibilities of a regulated health professional. While engaged in Bridging Education study, it is anticipated that you will model the same concern for ethics and integrity that you will be expected to demonstrate in carrying out your duties as a registered pharmacy technician. Essentially, this means that as a participant in Bridging Education, you agree to the following:
 - You must not submit an essay or assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else as your own work, or permit your own work to be submitted under the name of another student.
 - During a test or examination, you must not copy from another student or knowingly permitting another student to copy material.
 - You must not use unauthorized aids or materials in a test or examination.
 - You must not obtain an examination or test in advance of the scheduled date and time for writing through any means.
 - You must not share the content of an examination, test or assignment with other students.

Meeting Course Standards

Avoiding Plagiarism You need to be particularly diligent about avoiding **plagiarism**. Plagiarism refers to the presentation in whole or in part of material created by someone else, or the ideas, language or other intellectual property of someone else as one's own work without appropriate acknowledgment of the source of the material. It also includes incorporating direct quotations or large sections of paraphrased material in an assignment without appropriate acknowledgement of the source. Plagiarism applies to all assignments. .) **Instances of plagiarism by Bridging Program participants will not be tolerated and are subject to the penalties for this offence established by the college/university. Many educational institutions provide their faculty with** electronic plagiarism detection software – *Turnitin* is an example of this kind of software. Even without the advantage of electronic software, faculty are generally quite skilled at detecting plagiarized material.

Citing References Several of the assignments in the Bridging courses require you to research specific topics and record the results of that research. In addressing this assignment requirement, you will be expected to acknowledge your sources of information using the standardized, referencing system adopted by the American Psychological Association (APA). Use of a referencing system other than APA will result in a score of zero for the referencing component of the assignment rubric.

For a full discussion of APA referencing, please consult the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, July 2009*. There are also several online resources that will help you make sense of APA referencing standards:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/02/>

<http://www.douglas.bc.ca/library/apa.html>

<http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/apa.php>

http://www.library.dal.ca/Files/How_do_l/pdf/apa_style6.pdf

Ensuring Appropriate Style In some of the Bridging courses, you are required to submit written assignments. Generally, some marks are assigned for style and grammar. If you feel that you need some assistance with grammar and sentence structure, you may want to access the Online Writing Lab presented by Purdue University. This site which is open to users worldwide presents useful exercises and other free resources:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

E. Choosing the Delivery Option That's Best For You

When the program is fully implemented in each province, delivery is available in the traditional classroom setting or online. Each delivery model has unique advantages and characteristics. You are already familiar with the traditional classroom approach to learning. However, you may not have had experience with online learning.

Online learning for Pharmacy Technician Bridging Education is instructor-led, independent study. Each course is facilitated by an instructor who makes him/herself available to answer questions and provide feedback on performance, etc. Tests and assignments are generally submitted online. However, for each of the Bridging courses, you will be required to travel to a designated location to write the final examination.

If you are considering taking a Bridging course online, you need to ask yourself the following questions to make certain that you will be comfortable with this approach.

- *Am I comfortable following written instructions and viewing lesson materials using the computer?*
- *Do I have the necessary discipline to take responsibility for my own learning, visit the course site at regular intervals, and meet deadlines?*
- *Am I comfortable writing my thoughts and perspectives on specific topics and participating in written discussions with fellow students?*
- *Do I enjoy working in a computerized environment?*
- *Do I have the time to commit to an online course?*

That last question may seem strange to you. It is a common misconception that taking a course online is easier and less time-consuming than the traditional classroom approach to learning. It is true that online students save the time required to travel to a course site, and are free to work when and where they choose. However, the time commitment required for online study is significant – studies have indicated that students taking an online course regularly commit 5 – 12 hours weekly to their online study.

In addition, for a satisfying online study experience, you need to have good computer skills. It is essential that you know how to:

- *Perform basic functions on the computer – turning it on and off, rebooting, using a mouse, saving a file, etc.*
- *Organize your electronic files efficiently, so that you can find them easily*
- *Locate lost files on your hard drive*
- *Use word processing software to create and edit documents*
- *Use the Internet to send and receive email, including email messages with a file attached*
- *Use URLs or web addresses to locate articles, readings, etc.*

Finally, before you commit to an online course, you need to make certain that you are able to meet the technical and/or software requirements that are necessary to access the course materials easily. At a minimum, you will need the following:

- *Regular access to a computer with an Internet connection and Web access. Consult the course provider for specific information on processor requirements, RAM, operating system requirements, etc.*
- *An Internet account, ideally with a high speed connection. A Dial Up connection may work, but you will spend a lot of time waiting for files to download.*
- *A web browser that meets specifications*
- *A personal email account, or the ability to access an assigned email account within your course*
- *Specific software to access course materials, create and edit documents, etc.*

Technical requirements vary from province to province. The educational institution offering Bridging Education in your area has likely prepared a more detailed guide about hardware and software requirements to assist you in your decision about online learning.

III. Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

The Bridging program is intended for pharmacy technicians who are already working in both hospital and community-based pharmacies. You may have completed your initial training either through a public college or university program (prior to the introduction of CCAPP program accreditation), a private career college or 'on-the-job.' Depending on the length of time you have worked as a pharmacy technician, and the practice settings in which you have worked, you may be able to demonstrate the necessary competencies addressed in one or more Bridging courses. As a result, a Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) Challenge Examination process has been established to enable Bridging Education participants to earn educational credit for what they already know.

Frequently Asked Questions about PLAR

1) *Can I challenge all the courses in the program?*

No. The PLAR Challenge process is available for three courses only: *Management of Drug Distribution Systems*, *Pharmacology* and *Product Preparation*.

You must complete the **Professional Practice** course either online or in traditional classroom delivery. This course provides an essential foundation for the pharmacy technician's new and expanded role.

2) *What does the PLAR Challenge involve?*

To earn credit for any one of the three courses that are eligible for PLAR, you must successfully complete the Challenge Examination that has been developed for the course. Challenge examinations are offered at regular intervals by the various educational institutions involved in the delivery of Bridging Education.

PLAR examinations cannot be completed online. If you live in a community not served by an accredited delivery college or university, you must register for the Challenge Exam at your nearest college or university offering the Challenge exam, and make arrangements with the Program Coordinator to sit the examination. If you live within reasonable driving distance from the educational institution, you will be expected to access the examination at the established site. If driving is not feasible, arrangements can be made to write the examination at a secure location in your community, but extra fees may apply to cover the cost of invigilation, facility rental, etc. (Note: this option is not available out of province.) You need to confirm arrangements with the Program Coordinator at the college or university where you intend to register.

3) *Is the Challenge Examination the only requirement to earn the course credit?*

For the *Pharmacology* and *Management of Drug Distribution Systems* courses, a successful outcome in the Challenge Exam will earn you the course credit.

However, for the *Product Preparation* course, additional requirements apply before you attempt the Challenge Exam. You must demonstrate competency in both non-sterile and sterile product preparation using checklists (available on the College of Pharmacists' web site) established for this purpose. You need to arrange to demonstrate your product preparation skills in the workplace, or in some other practice site – e.g. former employer, college laboratory, etc. You will not be allowed to register for the PLAR Challenge Exam for *Product Preparation* without the completed checklists.

Each checklist requires the signature of an authorized assessor, ideally a pharmacist registered with the provincial College of Pharmacists. In situations where it is not possible to have a pharmacist complete the documentation, it may be acceptable to have a pharmacy technician program faculty member or a registered pharmacy technician assess and sign off on the demonstration, provided that he/she has demonstrated expertise in both non-sterile and sterile product preparation. If you plan to have someone other than a registered pharmacist assess your competency, you need to confirm an individual's eligibility to act as a reviewer for these situations with the Program Coordinator at the educational institution where you plan to register for the Challenge Exam.

4) *Is there a fee for PLAR?*

Yes, a fee applies for each of the Challenge examinations. Consult the educational institution where you intend to register for the PLAR Challenge Exam for information about fees and exam schedules.

5) *How should I prepare for the Challenge Exam?*

When you apply for a PLAR Challenge Exam, the expectation is that your work and life experience have already prepared you for a successful outcome. Therefore, minimal preparation should be required for the examination.

To determine whether you have knowledge and skills that are equivalent to what is expected in the course, you need to review the Course Outline for the course that you are thinking about challenging. Contact the Program Coordinator at the educational institution where you expect to register for the PLAR Challenge Exam for information on how to get a copy of the Course Outline. Pay particular attention to the Learning Outcomes and Learning Elements provided in the Outline – they are the standard you have to meet for the course. In addition, look at how much time is allocated in the course for particular modules/topics – that will be a cue for you about the emphasis that a particular topic should have in the PLAR exam. If you decide that you need a little review in a particular topic – pharmacy calculations, for example - it is your responsibility to find the appropriate resources.

Keep in mind, as well, that the Bridging Program addresses competencies required in both community and hospital-based pharmacy practice settings. It is not wise to attempt a PLAR Challenge exam in the Management of Drug Distribution Systems course, if you do not have relatively recent work experience in both areas of pharmacy practice.

Similarly, success in the PLAR Challenge for Product Preparation requires experience with both non-sterile and sterile product preparation.

6) What grade do I need to pass the PLAR Exam?

70% is the minimum required grade for successful completion of the PLAR exam for each of the eligible courses. Your results will be transmitted using a **Pass/Fail** or **Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory** designation.

7) What happens if I fail the PLAR Challenge Exam?

A PLAR Challenge exam can be attempted **only once** for each eligible course, regardless of the mark achieved. **There is no opportunity for any supplemental examination.** So, if you fail the PLAR Challenge Exam, you will be required to take the course either online or in a classroom.

Before you attempt any PLAR Challenge Exam, you will be required to sign an *Information/Privacy Waiver and Confidentiality Agreement* acknowledging that you are aware of these conditions, and confirming that you will not share any details of the content of the examinations with your colleagues. Your provincial College of Pharmacists monitors the results of PLAR Challenge exams received from the various delivery colleges/universities to identify any instances of repeated attempts to secure credit for the same course. Candidates who fail to comply with this requirement may jeopardize their ability to continue with the registration process.

8) Can I use PLAR to get credit for a Bridging Course which I previously failed?

You cannot use PLAR to challenge a course which you have previously failed, unless you are able to demonstrate that following the course failure, you engaged in some remedial self-study and/or work experience applicable to the course to be challenged. This means, then, that a period of time sufficient to accommodate the necessary remedial activity, must elapse between your course failure and the attempted PLAR Challenge Exam. Again, failure to comply with this requirement may jeopardize your ability to continue with the registration process.