

## What are the qualities of a good pharmacy technician?

*Article provided by Angela Jensen, pharmacy technician at Alpine Apothecary, Whitefish, Montana.*

Incredible work ethic? Positive energy? Can-do attitude? Challenge junkie? Sincere heart for patients and their needs? I could go on and on. Introducing Krista Schrader who embodies all this and more. I had the opportunity to visit with Krista, pharmacy technician with The Clinical Pharmacy at Northwest Healthcare of Kalispell, Montana to discuss her career, her thoughts about the industry and the direction she would like to see the field take.

But first, a little background. Krista has been a pharmacy technician for almost fifteen years with Northwest Healthcare. She has worked as a certified nursing assistant, both in the home and facility setting, and had a short excursion in the Navy. Krista's background is varied and she credits that to helping her develop her skills as a pharmacy technician. While that is true, I feel the previously mentioned qualities bump her into the exemplary technician category. Always looking for a challenge, it was while she was a CNA at Kalispell Regional Medical Center that an opportunity for change became available. Joining the inpatient pharmacy team, she quickly became a valuable member, displaying the hard work, attention to detail and devotion to patient care for which she has become known.

Krista's career as a pharmacy technician began as many in the field have, looking for change. Working in the in-patient hospital pharmacy, Krista became proficient in all areas but found a niche in billing for the long-term care facility the pharmacy serviced. The challenge of playing the insurance game was one that she became adept and good billers are worth their weight in gold. However, not one to be pigeonholed, Krista continued to jump in and get the job done when needed making IV's, med runs to the floors, filling automated med machines or purchasing for the pharmacy. It was this can-do attitude and billing finesse that propelled her into her next career change.

This came when Kalispell Regional Medical Center made the decision to create an outpatient pharmacy. Looking to build a solid starting staff and knowing that servicing long-term care facilities would be a leg of their business, Krista was a natural recruitment choice. Her vast knowledge base and ability to fit into any position made her a key technician for the start-up of an outpatient pharmacy. Not having worked on the retail side of pharmacy before, this presented a new challenge and Krista jumped right into it.

Krista states, "Everyday was a learning experience." It was a unique challenge to create an outpatient pharmacy inventory when her history had been with a hospital formulary. The question arose, "What do we need?" Working with the distributor and a seasoned retail pharmacist helped smooth the path. Building insurance profiles and working with a software system that no one in the state used posed some serious hurdles. Frustration occurred when MD's bypassed step therapy instead prescribing new latest and greatest meds. Krista battled through these obstacles with positive energy and a confident attitude to work with insurance companies, providers and patients to complete the patient care picture successfully.

Now a thriving outpatient pharmacy, Krista found her next career change. This change was in the form of a Meds to Beds program that Kalispell Regional Medical Center wanted to create. This program is designed to bring discharge meds to the patient's bedside before they leave the hospital. Providing this service can ensure compliance and continuation of care without delay that may occur post-discharge. Uniting her inpatient and outpatient pharmacy skills along with exceptional customer service and insurance knowledge, Krista was again the logical choice. It began as a service offered to open heart patients upon discharge but quickly became so successful that it was expanded to all discharge patients. The Meds to Beds program solved many problems for these patients---funding, logistics and convenience. Krista credits much of the success of the program to the nursing staff at Kalispell Regional. The nurses and Krista have formed a strong collaboration and communication that are key to this program. The nurses go over the medications in detail in the discharge plan that Krista leads into when she delivers the medications to the patient bedside. This program works because of the teamwork between the nurses and the pharmacy.

Krista and I discussed the current scope and advanced practices of pharmacy technicians. Frustration with recruitment of quality technicians is a constant problem even with a technician school in place. It is still a professional technical position, not just counting pills. We both agreed that it would benefit the

technician and the profession if pharmacy technicians had a stronger knowledge base before entering the field. Perhaps, even a new take on training retail pharmacy technicians to work closely with patients learning billing and insurance practices first, while developing strong customer service skills, may reduce some of this frustration. On the subject of advanced practice, Krista suggested an expansion of the Tech-Check-Tech program to include nursing home and extended care facility fills.

In many ways, Krista has individually developed many advanced practices as a technician without it being deemed as such. Her character, qualities of hard work ethic, attention to detail and enviable customer service skills are just a few of the reasons she falls into the great technician category. She is an example of how a pharmacy technician can grow and develop with effort, integrity and always an attitude to learn and improve.