

Name: David B Johnson, CPhT-Adv, CSPT

Practice: Richmond VA Medical Center (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs)

City/State/Country: Richmond, Virginia, USA

Title/Role: Lead Chemo IV Pharmacy Technician

Q: Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your journey as a pharmacy technician?

A: My pharmacy technician career began in 2015 after graduating from a technician training program. After graduation, I was hired as an Inpatient Pharmacy Technician at UNC Health. In 2016, I moved to Richmond, VA, and took a role as an Inpatient Pharmacy Technician at Richmond VA Medical Center. Shortly thereafter, in 2017, I was promoted to the role of IV Pharmacy Technician, and in 2019, I became the Lead Chemo IV Pharmacy Technician in the Hematology/Oncology clinic.

Q: Explain your current role at your practice.

A: As the Lead Chemo IV Pharmacy Technician, my primary role involves the preparation and compounding of IV chemotherapy products for the Hematology/Oncology clinic and occasionally for inpatient administration use that requires closer patient observation. I am also responsible for providing training in sterile compounding and hazardous drug compounding for all new technicians who have been hired into an Inpatient pharmacy role. I also manage inventory, including setting and adjusting PAR levels and collaborating with our pharmacy procurement team to make sure we always have the appropriate amount of drugs on hand.

Q: What aspects of being a pharmacy technician do you find most rewarding?

A: It is incredibly humbling to be a small, albeit important part of someone's cancer journey. I am the unseen individual in the background compounding medications, but on occasion, I get to hear a patient ring the bell that indicates the end of their chemo treatment, and I find those moments very rewarding, knowing I played a small (yet important) role in their recovery process. Another one of my favorite aspects of my job is providing training and development to other technicians, especially in the hazardous drug space. I usually have technicians arrive very unsure of themselves, and I love it when they have that "a-ha!" moment and watch as their self-confidence explodes because they realize that I've removed their training wheels and they're "driving the bus" (so to speak). It is so rewarding to watch a technician develop new skills, build confidence, and to be proud of their accomplishments.

Q: How do you stay updated on new medications and advancements in pharmacy practice? Are there any certifications or specialized training you are pursuing or have completed?

A: I have a passion for sterile compounding, so I try to stay up to date on USP<797> and USP<800> guidelines, which are the foundations for working in a pharmacy clean room space. I earned my CSPT designation from the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board in 2019 and must complete continuing education to renew that certification annually. I think those educational opportunities and updates are especially important because there is always room to improve our practices to keep pharmacy personnel safe in the hazardous drug and chemo workspaces.

Q: How do you ensure excellent patient care when patients? Can you share a memorable patient interaction that had a positive impact on their experience?

A: Providing excellent patient care should always be the main priority for all healthcare personnel. I always go by the mantra “treat your patients like you’d want your loved one to be treated.” My most memorable experience involved a neighbor of mine, whom I found out was a veteran and was scheduled to begin chemotherapy soon at my clinic. He learned I was going to be the pharmacy technician who was going to be making the medication he was going to be receiving, and I believe (or at least I hope) that helped put him at ease knowing a familiar face was going to be part of the team taking care of him.

Q: How do you collaborate with pharmacists and other team members of the multidisciplinary team to ensure quality patient care?

A: I cannot brag on my team enough. I am so lucky to have two chemo trained pharmacists and a Clinical Oncology Pharmacist and even though we literally sit feet away from each other, we utilize Microsoft Teams where we provide updates to each other on everything from current treatment status to new treatment approvals to inventory needs so we can ensure we have all of the necessary things in place to take care of our ever-growing patient load. We also send one another words of encouragement or a funny GIF to help get us through the occasional stressful day. We take care of each other, and I’m very proud of the work that we do every day to take care of our veteran population.

**Q: How do you handle changes or challenges in pharmacy operations or technology?
Are there any innovative practices or improvements you've introduced in your role?**

A: The biggest challenge in our operation is that we are a satellite pharmacy area that is designated as an SCA (Segregated Compounding Area), and as such, we are not always able to provide the full stability we would like to give our products. On one hand, it works for the purposes of providing services to an outpatient clinic space open during a specific set of hours; however, it becomes more of a challenge when we have inpatient infusions. In those circumstances, if a longer stability time is needed, we utilize the hazardous compounding area in our clean room suite in the Inpatient Pharmacy area. On the technology side, we do utilize a cloud-based system called SimpliFi 797 that allows us to document temperatures, positive/negative pressure values, and daily/weekly/monthly cleaning tasks. In addition, it allows us to document semi-annual gloved fingertip and media fill testing from start to finish to make sure we are in compliance with USP standards. We also hope to introduce IV workflow systems in the future that utilize gravimetric and camera systems to improve accuracy and reduce potential medication errors.

Q: What achievements or moments in your career as a pharmacy technician are you most proud of?

A: Earning my advanced technician certification (CPhT-Adv) and my CSPT certification are two achievements that I'm very proud of. I feel like it helps me stand out as someone who is dedicated to patient care, regulatory compliance, and professional development. I was also recently chosen as one of 24 technicians to attend the PTCB Leadership Institute this year and have volunteered to serve on the Career and Leadership Committee for ASHP/TPTS. I'm proud to have an opportunity to have a voice and help continue to grow the technician profession.

**Q: What advice would you give to someone aspiring to become a pharmacy technician?
Are there specific qualities or skills you believe are crucial for success in this role?**

A: My biggest advice to aspiring technicians is to take things one step at a time. I believe the famous saying goes "Rome wasn't built in a day" and I find that to be true when starting a new career. With that in mind, be open to opportunities that allow you to develop new skills. In the last 10 years that I have been in this profession, the number of opportunities for technicians has grown exponentially. We have technicians who are immunizing, technicians who are data analysts, technicians in informatics, and the list goes on and on. I'd also recommend getting involved in professional organizations to help network and build relationships with colleagues. I waited too long to do that but now that I am, I'm really enjoying finding common ground with others who are passionate about our profession.

Q: What hobbies or interests do you pursue outside of your role as a pharmacy technician? How do you find the balance between work and personal life?

A: My biggest interest outside of my role as a pharmacy technician is my little family that consists of me, my significant other, and my two very loyal beagles who each own a piece of my heart. We are huge Snoopy fans, and I can safely say that art imitates life as my pups display some very Snoopy-like qualities, and all I can do is shake my head some days! In addition (and this is probably going to get me in trouble), I am the biggest Real Housewives fan out there. I could talk about it for days on end! Doesn't matter which franchise, I'm here for all of it. It's my escape into a different realm, and it doesn't require a lot of brain power. I do think it's necessary to find those moments that allow you to sort of shut off and recharge so that you are at your best when you return to your workstation.