

# Contribution of Supervision to the Development of Advanced Pharmacy Technician Practitioners: A Narrative Review

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## **Abstract:**

The evolving healthcare landscape demands an expansion of roles and responsibilities for non-medical healthcare professionals, including pharmacy technicians. Effective supervision plays a crucial role in supporting the development of advanced pharmacy technician practitioners and facilitating their integration into multidisciplinary healthcare teams. This narrative review explores the contribution of supervision, particularly clinical supervision and educational supervision, to the development of advanced pharmacy technician practitioners. Clinical supervision focuses on overseeing day-to-day clinical performance, providing regular feedback, and supporting the application of knowledge and skills into practice. It involves guided learning, navigating practice environments, and fostering proficiency and confidence in clinical practice. Educational supervision complements clinical supervision by supporting learners in identifying their learning needs, navigating the learning pathway, and addressing academic challenges. The review highlights the complementary roles of these supervision forms in facilitating learning, application of knowledge and skills into practice, and professional development. Effective supervision models should incorporate elements of workplace-based learning, tailored feedback, interdisciplinary collaboration, and continuous professional development. By understanding the mechanisms that contribute to effective supervision, healthcare organizations can optimize the training and development of advanced pharmacy technician practitioners, ultimately enhancing patient care and addressing workforce challenges in the evolving healthcare landscape.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The healthcare landscape is experiencing a transformative shift driven by increasing patient demands, workforce shortages, and the need for cost-effective and high-quality care delivery (World Health Organization, 2016). In response to these challenges, healthcare systems worldwide are expanding the roles and responsibilities of non-medical healthcare professionals, including pharmacy technicians (WHO, 2016; NHS England, 2019). This skill-mix transformation aims to alleviate workforce pressures, optimize resource utilization, and improve patient outcomes through the effective integration of pharmacy technicians into multidisciplinary healthcare teams (Koehler & Bok, 2019; NHS England, 2019).

In the United Kingdom (UK), the role of pharmacy technicians has evolved significantly in recent years, with the introduction of advanced practice roles such as the Accuracy Checking Pharmacy Technician (ACPT) (Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education [CPPE], 2021). The ACPT programme, launched in 2017, aims to develop the skills required for pharmacy technicians to perform final accuracy checks on dispensed medications, improve leadership skills to direct dispensary teams, and support multidisciplinary teams in delivering patient-facing services (CPPE, 2021). This expanded scope of practice for pharmacy technicians aligns with broader efforts to optimize the skill-mix within primary care settings, as outlined in the NHS Long Term Plan (NHS England, 2019) and the 10-point GP workforce action plan (Mann et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2019).

Effective supervision plays a crucial role in supporting the development of advanced pharmacy technician practitioners and facilitating their integration into multidisciplinary healthcare teams (Kilminster et al., 2007;

Snowdon et al., 2019). Supervision encompasses various forms, including clinical supervision, educational supervision, managerial supervision, informal supervision, mentoring, and coaching (Kilminster et al., 2007; Pearce et al., 2013). These forms share a common goal: promoting the personal and professional development of learners through guidance, management, training, assessment, and remediation (Kilminster et al., 2007). This narrative review aims to explore the contribution of supervision to the development of advanced pharmacy technician practitioners, with a focus on clinical supervision and educational supervision. By examining the mechanisms that facilitate effective supervision and the complementary roles of clinical and educational supervisors, this review provides insights into optimizing the training and development of advanced pharmacy technician practitioners, ultimately enhancing patient care and addressing workforce challenges.

### **Clinical Supervision**

Clinical supervision focuses on overseeing day-to-day clinical performance, providing regular feedback, and supporting the application of knowledge and skills into practice (Kilminster et al., 2007; Farnan et al., 2012). It involves a more experienced clinician guiding and monitoring the development of learners, fostering their proficiency and confidence in translating and applying their knowledge into clinical practice.

### **The Role of Clinical Supervisors**

Clinical supervisors play a vital role in supporting pharmacy technician learners to overcome initial challenges, including a lack of established professional networks and information governance agreements between organizations (Butterworth et al., 2017). They assist learners in understanding and orienting themselves within their practice environments while navigating the relational and structural aspects of their new roles and work settings.

Additionally, clinical supervisors facilitate critical reflection, encouraging learners to be aware of their own working practices, strengths, weaknesses, and areas for self-regulation and improvement (Butterworth et al., 2017). They also signpost learners to other sources of relevant support, enabling them to progress their learning and expand their support networks.

### **Workplace-Based Learning and Guidance**

Billett (2002) highlights the importance of providing learners with opportunities to observe and participate in workplace activities, receive guidance from supervisors, and engage with experienced co-workers. Clinical supervision offers learners the opportunity to shadow experienced clinicians, be observed, and receive feedback, often through protected time for learning within the workplace.

Guided learning, where supervisors use techniques such as modeling, coaching, questioning, and analogies, is an essential component of the clinical supervisory role (Billett, 2002; Butterworth et al., 2017). It helps learners develop an understanding of values, procedures, and concepts that might not be learned through experience or discovery alone.

### **Workplace Affordances**

Billett (2002) describes "workplace affordances" as the ways in which the workplace shapes learning by providing access to activities and guidance. Clinical supervisors who also act as learners' line managers can offer a combination of regular prearranged meetings and ad hoc contact, facilitating learners' access to guidance and support (Butterworth et al., 2017).

However, mismatches between supervisors and learners' needs, such as supervisors lacking relevant experience or understanding of the role or course requirements, can lead to a lack of affordances for effective supervision and guidance (Butterworth et al., 2017). In such cases, delegating observation and assessment responsibilities to other experienced healthcare professionals can be beneficial.

### **Interprofessional Supervision**

Learners who receive clinical supervision from different types of healthcare professionals, particularly general practitioners (GPs) and nurses, tend to develop a broader understanding of how various professions provide patient care (Butterworth et al., 2017). This interprofessional approach to supervision supports the breadth of development necessary across all areas of advanced practice (Brewer & Barr, 2016; Nashat et al., 2020).

## **Educational Supervision**

Educational supervision complements clinical supervision by supporting learners in identifying their learning needs, navigating the requirements of the learning pathway, and addressing personal or academic challenges encountered during their progression (Butterworth et al., 2017; Patel, 2016).

## **The Role of Educational Supervisors**

Educational supervisors play a pivotal role in setting realistic and manageable aims and objectives with learners, providing regular structured reviews and feedback to support their progress (Butterworth et al., 2017). They serve as an ongoing available source of support, guiding learners through the learning pathway and addressing any challenges that arise.

## **Structured and Learner-Led Approaches**

Some learners experience structured and readily available educational supervision, with frequent planned reviews (Butterworth et al., 2017). Others perceive the educational supervision available as being largely learner-led, where they would have benefited from more proactive support from their supervisors.

## **Filling Gaps in Clinical Supervision**

Educational supervision can fill gaps where local clinical supervision is limited or unavailable, such as in community pharmacy settings (Butterworth et al., 2017). Educational supervisors can provide the necessary support and guidance, enabling learners to navigate the learning requirements and address academic challenges.

## **Supporting Supervisors**

Effective supervision requires support and training for supervisors themselves. While some supervisors report feeling well-supported, with access to experienced peers and broader networks, others report feeling largely unsupported, particularly those supervising learners outside their direct management (Butterworth et al., 2017). Suggestions for additional support include face-to-face supervisor training sessions, clear expectations and monitoring guidelines, and opportunities for ongoing professional development and peer support networks (Butterworth et al., 2017; Alsbury & Hazan, 2020).

## **Discussion**

This narrative review highlights the importance of effective supervision in supporting the development of advanced pharmacy technician practitioners. The findings underscore the complementary roles of clinical and educational supervision in facilitating learning, application of knowledge and skills into practice, and professional development.

Clinical supervision, provided by experienced clinicians, plays a crucial role in guiding learners' participation in workplace activities, fostering proficiency and confidence in translating knowledge into clinical practice. It involves guided learning through techniques such as modeling, coaching, and feedback, as well as navigating the relational and structural aspects of new roles and practice settings.

Effective clinical supervision requires appropriate workplace affordances, including access to regular and ad hoc guidance, as well as supervisors with relevant experience and understanding of the learner's role and practice setting. Interprofessional supervision, involving clinical guidance from different healthcare professionals, supports the breadth of development necessary for advanced practice roles.

Educational supervision complements clinical supervision by supporting learners in identifying their learning needs, navigating the requirements of the learning pathway, and addressing academic challenges. Educational supervisors provide ongoing support, setting realistic objectives, facilitating structured reviews, and offering guidance throughout the learner's progression.

While structured educational supervision is beneficial, a learner-led approach may leave some learners feeling unsupported, highlighting the need for proactive and responsive educational supervision. Educational supervisors can also fill gaps where local clinical supervision is limited, particularly in settings like community pharmacy.

Effective supervision models should incorporate elements of workplace-based learning, tailored feedback, interdisciplinary collaboration, and continuous professional development. By understanding the mechanisms

that contribute to effective supervision, healthcare organizations can optimize the training and development of advanced pharmacy technician practitioners, ultimately enhancing patient care and addressing workforce challenges.

### Conclusion

This narrative review explores the contribution of supervision to the development of advanced pharmacy technician practitioners, with a focus on clinical supervision and educational supervision. The findings highlight the complementary roles of these supervision forms in facilitating learning, application of knowledge and skills into practice, and professional development.

Effective clinical supervision involves guided learning, navigating practice environments, and fostering proficiency and confidence in clinical practice. It requires appropriate workplace affordances, experienced supervisors, and interprofessional collaboration. Educational supervision complements clinical supervision by supporting learners in identifying learning needs, navigating the learning pathway, and addressing academic challenges.

By implementing effective supervision models that incorporate workplace-based learning, tailored feedback, interdisciplinary collaboration, and continuous professional development, healthcare organizations can optimize the training and development of advanced pharmacy technician practitioners. This, in turn, will enhance patient care and address workforce challenges in the evolving healthcare landscape.

Future research should explore the development and evaluation of integrated supervision models that combine clinical and educational supervision, tailored to the specific needs of advanced pharmacy technician practitioners and their practice settings. Additionally, investigating the impact of interprofessional supervision and the role of technology in facilitating remote supervision could provide valuable insights for improving the training and development of this emerging healthcare workforce.

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