

# More Pharmacy Techs Could Mean More Jobs And More Mistakes

By Steven Rodriguez

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While doctors write prescriptions, and pharmacists cross check medications, the job of filling those prescriptions often goes to pharmacy technicians. Currently Florida allows 3 pharmacy technicians to work under every 1 pharmacist, but some lawmakers want to increase that ratio.

Pharmacy techs help licensed pharmacists dispensed properly prescribed medication to people. Bills in both the Legislature would up the number of technicians that a single Pharmacist can supervise from 3 to 6. Supporters say the increase will lead to more jobs. But others, like pharmacist George Malone, said having more people to supervise will mean more work for pharmacists.

“When that pharmacist opens that bottle at that counter, tells you what medication is for, shows you what that medication is for, asks the basic questions – when you do these things you reduce the risk of errors, but when you’re asking to double the amount of technicians you’re potentially asking to double the work load on the pharmacists: how can that possibly give us more time to counsel patients?” Malone said.

Other opponents say the issue is about quality not quantity. Chris Jerry’s 2 year old daughter died after he says a pharmacy technician incorrectly signed off one a lethal dose of chemotherapy medication. Jerry said the change will only benefit big pharmacy profits, allowing them to write more prescriptions per day.

“Ultimately the public is being put at risk because these retail pharmacy giants are putting their profits before the public’s safety,” Jerry said.

Jerry is from Ohio and travels the country discouraging legislation like this. Florida State University public health policy expert Dr. Les Beitsch, agrees that if there is a larger number of less trained people doing these kinds of pharmacy technician jobs, then costs decrease, and profits increase. But that doesn’t mean having more, well trained, technicians is a bad idea.

“If there are standards, and adequate supervision, having more technicians provide that service should make service more accessible and cost less without necessarily lowering the quality, if they’re not well supervised and managed and there aren’t standards then it has the potential to harm more people,” Dr. Beitsch said.

The House version of the bill has made it to the House floor for a second reading, while the Senate counterpart is slated to go before its first Senate committee stop Tuesday.

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