



BRITISH COLUMBIA
CENTRE ON
SUBSTANCE USE

Networking researchers, educators & care providers

Drug Checking Trainer's Manual



Acknowledgements

This document, and the entire BCCSU training program, has been developed collaboratively with experienced technicians from across BC. It is based on the experiences of trainers and experts in the field to whom we are extremely grateful for their work and support.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the BCCSU Drug Checking Trainers Manual! Your role as a trainer is an essential part of the ongoing operation and the growth of drug checking across the province. You are a part of the ongoing success of the program across the province.

The BCCSU Drug Checking Program was launched in 2017 to implement and evaluate drug checking in community settings throughout BC, with grants from Health Canada and Vancouver Foundation. Now funded through BC's Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions and the Ministry of Health, the program supports a network of drug checking services across BC. In partnership with BC's health authorities and community harm reduction organizations across the province, we collaborate with our partners to train technicians to operate drug checking technologies, share data collected from drug checking services with the public, and develop operational guidance and standard operating procedures.

Drug Checking Technician Training in BC

Training for technicians working in BC has two parts: an online course and a practicum with an experienced technician. The online course is a general overview of drug checking and helps orient the trainee to the basics that they will be learning in their practicum. The practicum is an opportunity to learn skills from an experienced technician in person. This is a key part of training for technicians. This is where they learn the nuances of analysis and how to interact with service users.

How to Use this Manual

This manual has been written to support you as a trainer in delivering the key information required during a practicum for a new drug checking technician. The manual contains these key components:

- Information and logistics regarding the delivery of the practicum
- The recommended teaching structure, topics, and skills to cover with trainees
- Skills and knowledge checklists required to complete the practicum final exam
- Facilitation tips, best practices, and activity suggestions for trainers

This manual is not for trainees or new technicians to learn the concepts and skills outlined below. Trainers are expected to be well versed in each of these areas prior to beginning training. Within BC the trainers will be expected to

Note: There is flexibility in terms of when and how each section of the practicum curriculum is taught as each trainee will require a different amount of time and support to learn and practice their skills. As a minimum requirement to complete the practicum, trainees should be able to demonstrate all of the items outlined in the Technician Knowledge and Skills Checklist (Appendix A) before attempting the final exam.

Trainer Role and Responsibilities

Although all technicians in training will have completed the online introductory course prior to their practicum, they may have varying degrees of experience working on the front-lines, interacting with service users, and knowledge of substances. To streamline and support trainee learning and development, all trainers are required to perform these core tasks:

- Schedule practicum hours/sessions with trainees
- Teach and guide trainees using this training manual and other relevant resources
- Provide support to trainees as they practice their skills and build their knowledge
- Advise trainees on best practices, provide tips, and discuss common experiences to help them prepare for the role
- Assess and report trainee progress to the BCCSU team when prompted

A Word of Gratitude

As we continue to grow and develop our programs, we greatly value all the trainers that have contributed to shaping our drug checking training program and to growing the field of drug checking. On behalf of the BCCSU team, thank you for the time and effort you have given to training future generations of drug checking technicians!

PRACTICUM OVERVIEW AND CHECK-IN

Your first task as a trainer involves confirming that your trainee fits the practicum requirements and understands the nature and scope of the training involved to become a certified drug checking technician.

Trainee Practicum Requirements

Prior to starting a practicum, a trainee must fulfill the following requirements:

- ✓ Complete the online BCCSU Drug Checking Technician Introductory Course
- ✓ Pass the Introductory Course Exam to receive a certificate of acceptance
- ✓ Log into the BCCSU online learning platform to set up their profile in order to log their practicum training requirements (i.e., skills developed during their hours of training), and gain access to learning resources
- ✓ Participate in a check-in meeting with their trainer to determine suitability and discuss details about practicum requirements and expectations

The estimated training time for trainees to complete all practicum requirements is 30-50 hours of hands-on experience.

Check-In Meeting

You will need to schedule a brief check-in meeting with your trainee before the start of their practicum. The goal of this informal meeting is to get to know the trainee and learn about their background, learning style, strengths, limitations, availability, and motivations for becoming a technician. You'll also have an opportunity to discuss practicum details and expectations, emphasizing the complex combination of skills needed for certification. This is also a good time to remind that even after all training and exams are done, the learning will continue.

This check-in meeting will help you confirm that the trainee is a good candidate for the practicum program. It will also inform how you adapt your teaching style to match your trainee's needs.

1. Learn about the trainee

Use some or all of the questions below to understand and assess your trainee's background and learning needs.

- B.** Reflecting on your personal history and interests, what made you want to become a drug checking technician?
- C.** What skills, experiences and/or strengths do you have that are relevant to drug checking?
- D.** What skills are you most excited about developing during your practicum? Why?
- E.** What do you think are your weakest areas of knowledge or skill related to drug checking? Why?
- F.** How would you describe your learning style? Give examples.
- G.** What is your availability? (In the ideal world, how would you schedule your 30 – 50 hours of practical experience?)
- H.** Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Suggestion

- Use the Pre-Practicum Check In (Appendix B) to record your trainee's answers and assess suitability.

2. Explain practicum expectations and requirements

Your role is to clearly explain both the practicum expectations and requirements needed for your trainee to pass the skills-based final exam. It is important to emphasize that working as a drug checker involves using a mix of skills from diverse fields, including chemistry, social work, harm reduction, and computer technology. This emphasis will ensure your trainee understands that they need to be committed to all aspects of the training to become a successful drug checking technician.

Key topics to discuss with your trainee:

- Time commitment: 30-50 hours (depending on prior skills and knowledge). It is important to emphasize to your trainee that there is not a fixed time limit and that it will vary.
- Progress log: how to use the online platform to record knowledge and skills during their practicum

- Additional online training: there may be additional online training required for trainees as part of their practicum. Please follow instructions from the BCCSU team regarding any additional training
- Evaluation process: Mid-practicum check-in meeting and final examination
- Other considerations: Any additional expectations that you have as a trainer or that is pertinent to your training site (e.g., additional readings or activities, dress code, materials to bring, etc.)
 - If you are training in a site where you do not typically work some of these things will be the responsibility of the site management.

Suggestion

- Share the *Knowledge and Skills Checklist* (Appendix A) and explain how these key items must be mastered before a trainee can take the final exam and, ultimately, work as a certified technician.

3. 3. Determine areas of strengths and weakness

Part of your job as a trainer involves assessing your trainees for areas of strengths and weaknesses prior to beginning the practicum. This will allow you to tailor the practicum to support their strengths and address areas of weakness. The answers to these questions will support you to create a learning plan and make the most effective use of the time you spend with your trainee.

Suggestions

- Review your trainee's answers to the check-in questions, and consider their engagement with the information you provided about the practicum and final exam. Follow your instincts as you decide whether the trainee is prepared to work with you.
- If a trainee does not seem ready, you may want to refer them to alternative programs and organizations that can build their skills in the field.

How to Evaluate Trainees During the Practicum

You will be responsible for ensuring that your trainees are successfully completing the new skills that they learn and are able to apply the knowledge they've learned. This evaluation is critical to ensuring that things are not missed and the trainee is on track throughout their practicum. At the end of each practicum section, you will find a checklist of the knowledge and skills to be covered. This will help you keep track of what your trainee knows and can do at each stage of the practicum.

Evaluating a trainee's performance can be assessed directly or indirectly in various ways. The following approaches will help you assess how the trainee is doing and may provide clarity on if they are completing the learning objectives.

Direct:

- Ask them to demonstrate their skills or knowledge
- Ask them to relay the information they know on the specific skill or topic
- Ask them to complete readings or homework that you review together during your next training session
- Test them with questions, activities, quizzes, role playing scenarios, and sample spectra

Indirect:

- Observe them as they familiarize themselves with the environment and complete drug checking tasks
- Get feedback from the trainee on how they are feeling about their knowledge and skills
- When possible, provide them with resources, links, and any additional materials that they can consult to help them complete learning objectives

At the end of Part 3, there will be an opportunity to evaluate your trainee's progress with the knowledge and skills learned so far. This Mid-Practicum Check In (Appendix C) allows you to rate your trainee's knowledge and skills on a scale of 1-5, and comment on both their strengths and areas in need of development. This will go alongside the feedback from the training coordinator from the theory exam. There is more detail below.

A final check-in opportunity will take place at the end of Part 6. At this time, you and your trainee will be able to revisit the Technician Knowledge and Skills Checklist (Appendix A) and determine if any additional training is needed before your trainee attempts the written and practical exam. There are more details on this check-in below.

PART 1: GETTING STARTED

Drug checking as a harm reduction service has come a long way over the last two decades. Starting in the music festival scene of the 1990s, drug checking has strong harm reduction roots. Today there are many different types of drug checking sites in operation, serving diverse clientele.

Your role at the start of the practicum is to help your trainee feel grounded in their understanding of the evolution of drug checking. They need to know how we got to where we are now. They also need to know the different contexts in which drug checking exists today. Your other key role involves orienting your trainee to your drug checking site and reviewing protocols, policies, and safety procedures in preparation for the rest of their training.

Curriculum Overview

Drug Checking Over Time

As a trainer you should be orienting your trainees to the context in which drug checking first emerged as it sets the tone for the work that we are doing. This is important to help your trainee understand that the work we are doing in BC is still novel and evolving. Some key points to remind your trainees of might include:

- Drug checking globally has its roots in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a part of the rise of psychedelic and nightlife counter-culture.
- Drug checking in BC began in the late 1990s as an informal, peer-based service in the electronic dance music scene, led by ANKORS in Nelson.
- The use of drug checking in the context of a public health emergency and to test opioid mixtures is a new and best practices are still emerging as we learn.

You can help your trainee by modeling your knowledge and appreciation for the people and organizations who pioneered drug checking, and who continue to contribute to its evolution.

Suggestions

- Ask your trainee what they remember from the online introductory course about the history and current context of drug checking in BC. If possible, refer to the drug history timeline featured in Module 1.
- Discuss highlights of both provincial and local drug checking history. If needed, refer to pages 5-8 in the [BCCSU Operational Technician Manual](#) to review the full history of drug checking.
- Encourage your trainee to learn about pioneering groups, including [TEDI](#), [ANKORS](#), [the Loop](#), [Drugs Data \(formerly Ecstasy Data\)](#)

BC Drug Checking Service and Staffing Models

As a trainer it is important to spend time with your trainee to understand the specific service model in which they will be working. This is also a good opportunity to review the variety of service models that operate in BC to understand how their colleagues might be working.

Suggestions

- Ask your trainee what they recall from the online introductory course about these six types of drug checking services available in BC today:
 - Point of care
 - Distributed
 - Pop-up
 - Mobile
 - Drop-off
 - Mail-in
- Provide your trainee with details about the service model(s) they will be working in, and any particularities with this model(s).
- Encourage your trainee to learn about other types of service models and opportunities to practice in them (e.g., at music festivals during the summer). For detailed descriptions of service models, refer to pages 28-41 in the [BCCSU Implementation Guide](#).

Site Orientation

Part of your role is to ensure that your trainees are able to be safe and successful, a key part of this is understanding the site in which they will be working. A good way to orient your trainee is by touring them around your drug checking site, familiarizing them with important information about the location and introducing them to staff, if applicable. You can use this opportunity to explain to your trainee both how the site functions and how their practicum will look.

If training is being done at a different site than the one where your trainee will normally work, you will still need to take time to go over key things about the facility.

By the end of the tour, your trainee should be informed on these aspects of the job:

- ☐ Hours of operation and contact information for specific site(s)
- ☐ Important staff/stakeholder names and roles
- ☐ Regular service users (general types of clients and any specific clients to be aware of) and traffic patterns
- ☐ Site policies and paperwork (general policies, site forms, resources available)
- ☐ Sample paperwork (UPHNS/Confirmatory paperwork, plus any internal tracking/collection forms/results forms)
- ☐ Amenities and points of interest (bathrooms, emergency exits, related support services, etc.)

Suggestions

- Invite your trainee to take notes during the tour about important site information, and to jot down questions as they arise. At the end of the tour, or along the way, you can check in with them and answer any questions.
- Remind your trainee that they will be required to run through the checklist of site information prior to starting work at a new location, whether it's a training session, a pop-up site, or their permanent work site.

Site Safety

Each drug checking site has its own set of safety policies and protocols, but the basics are the same everywhere. Your role as a trainer includes emphasizing the importance of safety at your drug checking site in these distinct areas:

- Site cleanliness
 - Garbage/disposal of samples
- Handling and operating technology carefully (see [Maintenance and Preventative Care for FTIR spectrometers in Drug Checking Services](#) for more details)
- Refraining from eating/drinking near technologies and samples
- Handling drug samples properly and professionally (this will be revisited in Part 3)
- Handwashing
- Any additional site etiquette, as appropriate

As a trainer you should ensure that your trainee has done any necessary organizational safety training before they begin drug checking training. This would include emergency plans and protocols, violence prevention, incident reporting, etc. for the site where they will be working.

Suggestions

- Walk your trainee through part or all of the [BCCSU Operational Guidance: Reducing exposure and contamination risks](#).
- Ensure your trainee knows where to find safety and procedure manuals on the [Drug Checking BC website](#).

Personal Safety

This is a good time to introduce your trainee to the personal safety practices they will need to use during their practicum and while working in drug checking as a technician. More details and reminders on safety will come up later in the practicum.

As a trainer, you must demonstrate personal safety through both instruction and role modeling. You can do this during orientation and other parts of the practicum in different ways:

- ☐ Discuss the importance of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- ☐ Demonstrate and/or show photos/images of what, when and how to wear PPE
- ☐ Demonstrate and/or show photos/images of how to properly collect, receive, process and dispose of samples
- ☐ Give your trainee the opportunity to demonstrate their personal safety skills and knowledge
- ☐ Discuss self-care related to maintaining physical and emotional safety and ensuring healthy boundaries

Suggestions

- Let your trainee know they will receive additional safety and self-care training in upcoming parts practicum, and that you will provide reminders about safety when relevant.
- Refer to page 25-27 in the [BCCSU Operational Guidance Manual](#) for photos/images of safety equipment and cleaning supplies.

Part 1 Knowledge and Skills Checklist

At the end of Part 1, the trainee can

- ☐ Describe some of the history and context of drug checking in BC
- ☐ Describe the layout of the drug checking site and what to expect working in that location
- ☐ Describe/demonstrate knowledge on information specific to the drug checking site (important staff members, hours of operation, where to find policy and practicum information)
- ☐ Describe/demonstrate site safety and emergency procedures
- ☐ Describe the importance of PPE and safety on the job
- ☐ Describe/demonstrate how to wear required PPE

- ❑ Explain/demonstrate safety risks when working with drug samples and drug checking equipment (MSDS etc)
- ❑ Know the signs of a drug poisoning and how to respond to a suspected drug poisoning
- ❑ Explain/demonstrate how to properly handle and dispose of samples
- ❑ Access resources to support drug checking practice (e.g., colleagues/trainer, manuals, online resources)

PART 2: DRUG CHECKING: A PERSON-CENTRED SERVICE

As a trainer, your role is to help trainees understand that “who” is getting their drugs checked is as important as “what” is getting checked. Technicians are front-line workers who can play an important role in their communities by a vital public health service.

The goal of Part 2 is to highlight why and how drug checking is as much about working with people, and meeting them where they’re at in their lives, as it is about testing substances. Drug checking involves the art of compassion and clear communication as much as it involves science and technology.

Curriculum Overview

Drug Checking as Harm Reduction

As a trainer it is important that you orient your trainee to how drug checking fits into the broader spectrum of harm reductions practices. Some of these other harm reduction interventions might be available directly in the same building/space as drug checking.

If your trainee is new to harm reduction it may be helpful to illustrate some of the other services that harm reduction might include. If your site/service is also distributing safer use supplies this is a good opportunity to discuss what those supplies are and how they might be used as well as how they might integrate those tools into their messaging after a drug check.

Your trainee will have their own understanding of what harm reduction means to them and what activities it encompasses. It is important for your trainee to know which harm reduction services are operating in their community, and how drug checking fits into the broader picture.

Suggestions

- Ask your trainee to describe what harm reduction means to them. Encourage them to think about key words that they associate with harm reduction and brainstorm how those words can be applied in a drug checking service.
- Refer to the harm reduction principles and core values outlined on pages 21-23 in the [Drug Resource and Education Project's Drug Checking Manual](#), check out the [Harm Reduction Principles](#) featured on the National Harm Reduction Coalition website, or the [Catie Harm Reduction Fundamentals](#)

Understanding Service Users

Your role as a trainer includes helping your trainee understand who may be using drug checking services and for what purpose(s). Your trainee needs to know how a drug checking technician can help a service user beyond just identifying particular chemical compounds in a particular substance. After all, drug checking is reliant on technicians being able to build relationship with service users.

Your trainee must know and behave in a way that promotes drug checking service as non-judgmental and that they should always be striving to provide and support positive interpersonal experiences at the job site.

Suggestions

- Invite your trainee to reflect on the passage below on the trauma- and violence-informed approach to working with service users. Then discuss the potential effect of this approach on people who use drugs.

How to take a trauma- and violence-informed approach with service users:

Focus on developing trust and building a sense of safety in your interactions with service users. Safety and trust can be enhanced by providing opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection. For example, tell your service users you are glad they came in today. It's all about relationships.

- Refer to [Third Party Drug Checking Without Consent \(2024\)](#) to discuss who may be using drug checking services on behalf of others. The document provides scenarios and scripts for interacting with people who may be requesting services for someone else.

Connecting with Service Users

As a trainer, it's important to emphasize that connecting with service users starts the moment they enter the drug checking facility. A smile and friendly greeting can go a long way toward showing respect and care for a person. You can help your trainee understand this by modelling friendliness and talking about the messages we give service users with both words and body language.

Suggestions

- Lead a dialogue on language use by referring to the Language Matters section on page 38 of the [Drug Resource and Education Project's Drug Checking Manual](#).

“By using language that puts people first, we recognize their humanity, and that they possess many different traits, conditions, talents and experiences. They are multifaceted people, and reducing them to one phrase or label is dehumanizing. For example, PEOPLE who use drugs or PERSON experiencing homelessness. An individual may be a person who uses drugs but they can also be, among other things, a mother, an artist, and a teacher.”

- If your trainee has lived or living experience, or personal connections to folks experiencing addiction, invite them to reflect on some of the ways that substance use has affected their life and how human connection can be a powerful tool to support someone experiencing drug-related challenges.

Connecting with service users also requires **empathy**, the ability to understand and share feelings of another person.

Suggestions

- Invite your trainee to brainstorm a list of things to consider when greeting or engaging with service users. Or, refer to the list below and ask them if they have something to add.

Things to consider about service users

- They might not be used to people being kind to them
 - They might be agitated, in pain or withdrawal
 - They might be anxious
 - They might not want to talk about anything except what's in their drugs
 - They might need to meet you many times before they trust you enough to confide in you
 - They might be embarrassed or ashamed of their drug use
 - They might be rude or aggressive if they feel belittled or judged or for some external reason to the interaction with a technician
 - They might want you to know things about them that have nothing to do with drug use
 - They might want help finding a way to change their lifestyle
 - They might be in a hurry so they can use their drugs
 - They may not want anyone else knowing that they are getting their drugs checked
 - They may have safety concerns about being seen at the site
- Encourage your trainee to read the drug checking scenarios in the case studies on pages 17-20 in the [Drug Resource and Education Project's Drug Checking Manual](#). Debrief with them afterward about their observations and insights.

An important part of building successful relationships with service users includes clear communication from the start. It is vital to remind trainees about what they learned in the online introductory course regarding these key things a drug checker must be able to communicate:

1. The two technologies you will be using
2. The benefits and limitations of the FTIR and test strips, and what the drug checking process looks like (what drug checking results can tell us and what they can't, limitations of the results, how they can receive results, etc.)

3. If and how the service user will be able to receive any sample leftover from the testing process
4. The length of time the test will take

Suggestion

- Invite your trainee to learn and practice a script that involves greeting a service user and communicating the limitations of drug checking. Encourage them to try different ways of speaking and interacting in preparation for working with people who might be dealing with a lot of grief or stress at that moment. Below is a sample script from the online introductory course:

“Hi, I’m David, a drug checking technician. Have you used drug checking services before?”

I am going to use two different technologies to check your drugs today. The FTIR has a detection limit of 5% concentration. This means that any number of substances could be present in your sample below this amount, but I will not be able to see them with the spectrometer. This is why we use also fentanyl and benzodiazepine test strips, because they are more sensitive and can detect most of those substances in small amounts.

I also want to let you know that sometimes the spectrometer has a hard time giving estimates for how much of a substance is in a sample, especially if the mixture is complicated. I will do my best to give you as much information as I can.. Is it okay if I take what I need for the tests? I will have to dissolve some of your sample in water for the test strip. The FTIR and test strip tests will take about 10 minutes per sample to complete. You can expect your results to be ready around ____, Are you okay with that?”

Understanding and Communicating Limitations of Drug Checking Services

One of the most important things to communicate with service users, whether it is their first time or hundredth time is to understand what we can and cannot do with FTIR based drug checking. A key part of your role is to help your trainee understand the limitations of drug checking technologies so they can clearly express those limitations to service users.

Suggestions

- Spend time with your trainee exploring why some people struggle with the concept of limitations, and why it's important for service users to know them.
- Help your trainee understand and communicate drug checking limitations by following these 5 steps:
 1. Remind or ask them to recall what they learned in the online introductory course about limitations.

Limitations of test strips:

- They cannot determine concentration
- They cannot specify the substance detected
- Sensitivity varies with analogues of the target substance

Limitations of the FTIR:

- Library references
 - Chemically similar drugs
 - “Chocolate chip cookie effect”/heterogeneity
 - Limit of detection
 - Substances not suited for FTIR
 - Quantification
2. Walk through Harm Reduction Messaging (Appendix C) and share ideas about the wording of the messages.
 3. Demonstrate different ways to communicate limitations to service users.
 4. Invite your trainee to practice communicating limitations through roleplay.
 5. Introduce different situations that can occur while receiving, processing and returning samples, and while providing harm reduction information. If needed, you may also want to review ‘frequently asked questions’ by service users and different options for responses.

Technician Responsibilities, Boundaries and Self-Care

Your role is to help your trainee know what their responsibilities to a client are so that they can set appropriate boundaries and engage in self-care. You can help your trainee by giving them opportunities to articulate what they think a technician's responsibilities include and then offering your insights and experiences.

Suggestion

- Start a conversation about technician responsibilities by reading aloud the passage below. Then work with the trainee to develop a list of things technicians are and are not responsible for.

“Drug checking provides a key opportunity to connect with people who use drugs and provide them with valuable and potentially life-saving harm reduction information. These conversations can occur during the few minutes while substances are being checked or while providing drug checking results back to service users. It is critical for the drug checking technician to be familiar with some of the more common drug interactions and be able to provide detailed information on the results of the drug check and potential harms.”

Drug checking is a complex job that can be mentally or emotionally challenging. Your trainee needs to know how to care for themselves and both establish and maintain boundaries with service users to avoid burnout and other problems. They also need to know when and where to access resources and who to talk to if they are feeling overwhelmed or need support.

Suggestions

- Check in routinely with your trainee, and encourage your trainee to check in with themselves.
- Encourage your trainee to reach out to the drug checking community of practice and other technicians. The drug checking team at BCCSU is also always available for information and support.

Building Community

The BC Drug Checking Technician community is constantly growing and evolving. There are more opportunities than ever to find support and learn from others with different experiences. Your trainee may benefit from knowing early on how they fit into the BC drug checking picture and how they can maintain contact with the drug checking community. You can do this by offering a list of platforms where technicians can connect with others and a list of the drug checking facilities in the province.

Suggestions

- Ensure your trainee knows about and is connected to the Slack Channel and Technician Working Group to stay up to date about changes, opportunities, news, and more in BC.
- Inform your trainee about community news platforms (e.g., Substance reports, Toronto Drug Checking reports, Opioid Data Lab (UNC))
- Have your trainee review the resources on the [Drug Checking BC website](#).
- Encourage trainees to visit the list of BC drug checking facilities on the [BCCSU website](#).
- For any additional questions on BCCSU programs and resources trainees and technicians can contact drugchecking@bccsu.ubc.ca.

Part 2 Knowledge and Skills Checklist

At the end of Part 2, the trainee can

- ☐ Describe how and why drug checking is a harm reduction strategy and service
- ☐ Describe who uses drug checking services and why
- ☐ Explain how to approach communications and interactions with service users
- ☐ Articulate the information provided to service users prior to checking their drugs
 - Harm reduction messaging
 - Description of the process
 - Limitations of drug checking
- ☐ Demonstrate different responses to basic common questions service users might have about the process

- ❑ Articulate the role and limitations of a technician and explain the importance of boundaries and mental health
- ❑ Access support at their site and in the technician community of practice and where to locate opportunities to continue learning

PART 3: USING DRUG CHECKING TECHNOLOGIES

During the online introductory course, your trainee learned the basic purpose, processes, and steps to working with drug samples and drug checking technologies. Your role is to help your trainee enhance their drug knowledge and gain hands-on experience using test strips and the Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) and OPUS. Since each trainee begins practicum with their own background and skill set, it may take some trainees longer than others to get comfortable working with samples and operating technologies.

This section contains information and suggestions to guide your discussions about drugs and drug checking technologies, and tips for helping your trainee build confidence in their technical skills.

Curriculum Overview

Drug Knowledge

Part of the training is orienting your trainee to what the common effects of substances we commonly see are. They should also know what the common cuts, buffs, and contaminants to expect alongside substances are.

It is important that your trainee understands what is publicly reported about the data they contribute to DCBC, you will need to review the categories and types of substances recorded in drug checking reports, including cutting agents and buffs.

It is important that they learn how to discuss those drugs, and others, in a non-judgmental fashion and in ways that clients will understand. It is also important to know how to describe the effects that a user may experience and what may influence the way that users experience a substance.

Suggestions

- Refer to one or more of the reports from the [Monthly Data](#) section of the Drug Checking BC website. These can be used to introduce or confirm basic information about the kinds of drug samples checked in BC, definitions of drug categories relevant to public drug checking reporting, and the names of commonly used drugs and buffs.
- Note: It's important to remind your trainee that these are the categories used in DCBC but are not universal and may not be the most usable for service users in some circumstances. We acknowledge that specifically the 'psychedelic' category that we use is often too broad to be used with service users. But we use these broad categories as a way to present data provincially in monthly reports and on our dashboard.
- Refer to the [Drugs Wheel](#) and walk through the categories of substances with you trainee. You can also use their effects wheel to help your trainee understand the different effects that are broadly associated with each class of drugs on the wheel.
- Encourage your trainee to use the [DrugCocktails.ca](#) website that will provide helpful context for mixtures of pharmaceuticals and street drugs.
- Use the images and information in the [BCCSU Guidelines for Identifying Colours and Textures](#) and/or real drug samples to help your trainee gain a deeper understanding of the look and feel of the different substances they may encounter. Remind them that colour and texture alone cannot be used to identify substances.
- Time permitting, collect interesting and relevant drug-related facts and make a memory-testing activity to enhance your trainee's knowledge throughout the practicum.

Setting Up (And Cleaning Up) Workstation

An important part of the workflow for you to teach your trainee is how to set-up and take-down their workstation, including assembling and disassembling the FTIR. Establishing a routine way to set up (and clean up) a workstation can help to ensure that no steps are missed. You can help your trainee learn a routine by walking them through your usual set up (and clean up) procedures.

It's important that trainees understand not only how to clean up a workstation but also why it is important and why we use alcohol to clean. This will also be important with cleaning between samples and handwashing, etc.

Your role is to model the tasks involved in setting up and dismantling a workstation and give your trainee a chance to execute these tasks.

- ☐ Review tools, technologies, workstation supplies
- ☐ Demonstrate setting up and taking down workstation
- ☐ Invite trainee to practice setting up and taking down workstation
- ☐ Review FTIR care practices and transportation (if needed)

Suggestions

- Refer to pages 14-15 and pages 21-25 in the [BCCSU Operational Technician Manual](#) for workstation requirements and best practices.
- Refer to the [BCCSU Operational Guidance: Reducing exposure and contamination risks](#) to guide discussion on safe drug handling and exposure prevention.

Working With Drug Samples

Trainees may be new to handling drug samples or may have only handled them in other contexts in the past. It is important that you demonstrate for your trainee how to appropriately handle drug samples. This includes taking only the amount needed, using appropriate PPE, labelling and storing them safely, etc.

Your role is to model the tasks involved in handling samples and give your trainee a chance to execute these tasks.

- ☐ Review best practices for working with samples
- ☐ Demonstrate collecting, handling and returning samples
- ☐ Invite trainee to practice collecting, handling and returning samples

Suggestion

- Refer to pages 16-19 in the [BCCSU Operational Technician Manual](#) for the best practices on working with drug samples.

Using Test Strips

Your role is to model the tasks involved in using test strips and give your trainee a chance to execute these tasks. Your trainee must be confident and well versed in using test strips and be able to use and interpret them correctly so that service users get the best results possible.

- Review use/benefits/limitations of test strips
- Demonstrate using/reading test strips
- Invite trainee to practice using/interpreting test strips
- Address common challenges using test strips

Suggestion

- Refer to pages 42-46 in the [BCCSU Operational Technician Manual](#) for best practices on how to use test strips.

Operating the FTIR and Opus

At this point in the training, your focus should be on ensuring your trainee is comfortable with physically operating the FTIR, without risking damage to the FTIR, and understands the basics about OPUS and how to interact with it. The focus is not on developing analysis skills.

Your role is to model the tasks involved in operating the FTIR and OPUS, and give your trainee a chance to execute these tasks.

- ☐ Review use/benefits of FTIR
- ☐ Review limitations of FTIR (from part 2)
- ☐ Demonstrate preparations for spectrum analysis
 - How to calibrate
 - How to plate a sample
 - How to adjust the anvil pressure
- ☐ Invite trainee to practice preparing for spectrum analysis
- ☐ Demonstrate cleaning and [caring for the FTIR](#) (between samples and between shifts)
- ☐ Invite trainee to practice cleaning and caring for the FTIR
- ☐ Address common challenges with using the FTIR

Suggestions

- Refer to pages 21-40 in the [BCCSU Operational Technician Manual](#) for best practices on operating the FTIR and OPUS software.
- Refer to the Standard Operating Procedure [Maintenance and Preventative Care for FTIR Spectrometers in Drug Checking Services](#) for information on how to appropriately care for an FTIR.

Performing Spectrum Analysis and Reading Results

Learning how to master spectrum analysis is the key skill to teach and will take the most amount of focus for both you and your trainee. This learning may include orientation to some chemistry/chemistry principles, discussing key features of spectra, reviewing the limitations with respect to the spectral analysis, or whatever else you see fit.

During this section, it is important to review the entire process, from taking a reading to deciding you are done with subtractions. Your trainee will benefit from you explaining the steps/decisions you make and why you make them.

Your role is to model the tasks involved in performing spectrum analysis, including reading results, and give your trainee a chance to execute these tasks.

- ☐ Review libraries, pros and cons of each type, and why/when to use combinations (Refer to the [FTIR Libraries for Drug Checking SOP](#))
- ☐ Demonstrate performing subtractive analysis and reading results
- ☐ Invite trainee to practice performing subtractive analysis and reading results
- ☐ Address common challenges with spectrum analysis and reading results

Suggestion

- Refer to page 20 and pages 50-54 in the [BCCSU Operational Technician Manual](#) for best practices on understanding drug checking results.

Part 3 Knowledge and Skills Checklist

At the end of Part 3, trainee can

- ☐ Define the basic categories of drugs
- ☐ List names and nicknames of commonly used drugs seen in drug checking
- ☐ Identify key resources containing detailed drug knowledge
- ☐ List the items needed to set up a workstation
- ☐ Demonstrate how to pack/unpack supplies and set up/take down the workstation
- ☐ Demonstrate how to receive samples from service users
- ☐ Demonstrate how to safely and effectively handle samples
- ☐ Demonstrate how to return the sample to the service user
- ☐ Explain why we use test strips (what they can and cannot tell us)
- ☐ Demonstrate how to use test strips
- ☐ Demonstrate how to read results of test strips
- ☐ Demonstrate how to assemble/disassemble the FTIR correctly
- ☐ Demonstrate the steps to set up and operate the FTIR machine for a drug check
- ☐ Demonstrate how to load a sample onto the FTIR and scan it
- ☐ Demonstrate how to perform subtractive analysis using the OPUS
- ☐ Understand the different libraries available for drug checking and when to use them
- ☐ Understand when to stop the analysis
- ☐ Demonstrate how to clean the FTIR between samples

Mid-Practicum Check In

At this point in the practicum, your trainee will have spent a number of hours developing their safety, communication and basic technology skills. They may or may not have fully met the objectives of the first three components of the practicum and may require more time reviewing some concepts/practices.

This is a good time to check in with your trainee to assess their overall performance and consider ways to enhance their knowledge and skills going forward.

1. With the trainee, review the Skills and Knowledge Checklists (from Parts 1-3) to identify any gaps in their knowledge or skills.
2. Use the frame in Appendix D to identify how confident the trainee is feeling with their knowledge and skills, and identify any areas of strength or weakness. You may also want to identify with the trainee any areas to work on or next steps for the rest of the practicum.
3. Provide the trainee with any personal feedback on their knowledge and skills and jot them down in the trainer notes.
4. Support your trainee to complete the theoretical exam in the online practicum course
5. Use the results of the theoretical exam from the BCCSU Training Coordinator to discuss any weak points with the trainee and to make plans for the rest of the practicum hours focusing on any weaknesses.

PART 4: EXPLORING DRUG COMBINATIONS AND MIXTURE ANALYSIS

In this section you will be introducing your trainee to the mixture analysis function in OPUS. Mixture analysis is a particularly challenging tool to navigate, and your trainee may need extra time and support to learn how to manage complex drug combinations. This section offers extra resources to help you help your trainee learn as quickly and effectively as possible.

Curriculum Overview

Understanding Complex Drug Combinations and Alerting

As mentioned in Part 3, being up to date on drug knowledge and the current drug supply helps to prepare drug checkers for more complex drug combinations showing up at their site or around the region. This is a good time in the training process to review things on a local level, to discuss new drugs that may be appearing, and talk about how we identify and handle new drugs in the supply. It's also helpful to have your trainee look at national/international resources that may be relevant in identifying new substances, such as Toronto Drug Checking, CSFRE, or Substance at UVIC.

This is also an opportunity to discuss what drugs or drug mixtures may qualify for a public health alert and what the process is for requesting an alert in your health authority.

Your role is to develop your trainee's understanding of common and complex drug combinations that they may encounter as a technician.

Suggestions

- Remind your trainee that they can find information about the current drug supply and common drug combinations in the Monthly Data and Data Reports on the [Drug Checking BC](#) website. Review an example of a Data Report that includes a more complex drug combination.
- Walk your trainee through websites and apps that feature detailed information on the potential effects of drug combinations, such as [TripSit](#) and [Psychonaut Wiki](#). Encourage your trainee to spend time understanding drug combinations and why certain combinations may increase risk.
- Look through reports from these groups that have performed different types of drug analysis and may notice and identify new substances before FTIR:
 - [Toronto Drug Checking](#)
 - [CSFRE](#)
 - [UNC](#)
 - [Substance](#)

Performing Mixture Analysis

It is important to explain to your trainee that FTIRs are not designed to quantify ingredients in a mixture, and we rely on this algorithm to give best estimates—it is imprecise in nature because of this.

Your role is to discuss the use, benefits and limitations of mixture analysis, model the tasks involved in performing mixture analysis, and give your trainee a chance to execute these tasks.

- ☐ Explain the use, benefits and limitations of mixture analysis
- ☐ Give several demonstrations of performing mixture analysis
- ☐ Invite your trainee to practice performing mixture analysis and reading results

Suggestions

- Start by summarizing the key concepts in quantification. Review the [Fentanyl Quantification and Messaging](#) for more information about these commonly used terms:

- **Accuracy and Precision**

Accuracy is how close the estimate (point-of-care result) is to the true value. Precision refers to how narrow of an estimate is provided (e.g., a range of 5–10% is less precise than reporting 7.5%).

- **Purity vs. Percentage**

Percentage determined at point-of-care can vary significantly from the purity determined by confirmatory testing. This one of the reasons to avoid the term 'pure' when delivering drug checking results.

Note: You might need to use images or draw pictures to support your explanation.

- Lead a discussion about relaying quantified results by inviting your trainee to comment on this statement:

“The way quantified results are delivered to service users is important to convey the most accurate results possible within limitations of the technology, and messaging needs to be consistent across technicians to help prevent misinterpretation of results.”

If needed, refer to pages 5-7 in the [Fentanyl Quantification and Messaging](#).

Part 4 Knowledge and Skills Checklist

At the end of Part 4, the trainee can

- ☐ Articulate the importance of staying up to date on the drug supply and where to find current drug information
- ☐ Describe common drug combinations and their effects
- ☐ Describe the purpose, benefits and limitations of mixture analysis
- ☐ Explain the limitations of mixture analysis
- ☐ Demonstrate how to perform a mixture analysis using OPUS
 - Know when it is appropriate to attempt mixture analysis
 - Understand how to interpret mixture analysis results
 - Communicate the findings from mixture analysis to clients appropriately

PART 5: RECORDING AND SHARING RESULTS

Trainees should understand the purpose of recording and sharing results, and why submitting sample information correctly and in a timely manner is an important part of their role. In this section you will facilitate training around both recording findings and sharing information with service users.

Remind your trainee that when their data is inputted correctly it allows for the BCCSU and other people who use the data to create effective and timely public health responses. When discussing results it is also good to remind trainees of how their results contribute to a broader reporting system that includes the [BCCSU monthly reports](#), and the [DrugSense Dashboard](#) where all their data is used for public dissemination.

Curriculum Overview

Recording Sample Information in DCBC

Your trainee learned about DCBC in the online introductory course and may have been observing you walk through recording data in the system. To gauge their understanding of DCBC, ask your trainee what they recall about the purpose and process of using the database before walking through the steps and explaining when and how to take further action.

Prior to allowing your trainee to use DCBC you will need to have them sign their DCBC contract which you will also need to explain to them and review what the contract means.

Your role as a trainer is to model the tasks involved in using the DCBC platform, and give your trainee a chance to execute these tasks.

- ☐ Demonstrate how to use DCBC
- ☐ Invite your trainee to practice recording information in DCBC
- ☐ Demonstrate how and when to use the different functions available in DCBC
- ☐ Discuss common errors and ways to avoid them

Suggestions

- Refer to Module 6 in the online introductory course to review the steps and tips involved in accurately recording information in each phase of data entry:
 - Pre-check
 - Results
 - Post-check
 - Finalizing the entry
- Talk about creating good habits for data recording. Make it clear to the trainee why it is important to enter the data accurately and in a timely manner.
- Refer your trainee to the [DCBC quick reference guide](#) and the [DCBC Manual](#), which are both accessed from the home page of DCBC.
- Refer to pages 48-49 in the [Drug Checking Operational Technician Manual](#) to guide a discussion on when and how to send a recommendation for a drug alert. Specifically:
 - Discuss the provincial public health & toxic drug alerting text system and how that works as well as any local alerts or alerting processes that may be relevant.
 - Review alerting processes for your health authority with your trainee, including what might trigger an alert request.
 - Provide guidance on the request process, who to contact, and what information to include.

Sharing Results and Harm Reduction Information

A key part of your job is to support your trainee to be able to provide drug checking results and relevant and targeted messaging to service users.

Trainees must learn how to keep service users and their lived and living experience in mind when sharing results and other harm reduction information. Your trainee needs to know what they are required to say to service users when sharing results, and what additional pieces of information might be beneficial to the client based on the results and the client's personal experiences with drugs.

Your role as a trainer is to model the tasks involved in sharing results and related harm reduction information, and give your trainee a chance to execute these tasks.

- ☐ Demonstrate what to say (and not say) when sharing results
- ☐ Invite your trainee to practice sharing results through role play
- ☐ Explore frequently asked questions from service users around the drug checking process and drug results

Suggestions

- Refer to the chart on pages 6-7 of [Fentanyl Quantification and Messaging](#) to highlight different ways of communicating results, and the strengths and weaknesses of each method.
- Review the three limitations of quantified results that must be relayed to all service users, and give your trainee a chance to practice expressing them in their own words:
 1. These results are for the sample tested and the rest of the sample may have slight differences throughout.
 2. Percentages are estimates and are not a measure of purity, and a technician cannot say whether it is likely to be the high or low end of the range.
 3. Other substances may be present in the sample but not detectable with the technology.

Note: This is a good opportunity to remind your trainee to clarify when a substance is detected by test strip only, as it means an analogue or quantity cannot be specified.

- Use the Drug Checking Disclaimer on page 50 in the [Drug Checking Operational Technician Manual](#) to summarize the essential elements in harm reduction messaging.

Suggestions

- Encourage your trainee to memorize and get comfortable saying these 6 key points:

1. Don't use alone

Note: This is a good time to help your trainee familiarize themselves with lifeguard and NORS as tools for folks who may otherwise use alone.)

2. Know the signs of overdose and call 911 if you think someone needs help
 3. Start with a small amount
 4. Carry naloxone and know how to use it
 5. Use caution when mixing substances which may increase your risk of overdose
 6. Use where help is available, such as an overdose prevention site, if possible
- Discuss harm reduction language do's and don'ts. Using this passage as a prompt:

When discussing harm reduction, it is important to choose your language carefully to ensure that you are not coming across as paternal, shaming, or denigrating. For example, avoid using language like, "You should...", "You need to...", "I need you to listen...". To help people feel safe to talk with you, it is more effective to use disarming language or to ask clear questions, such as: "Other folks have found these tools can help," or "Are you going to be with people today?"

- Discuss frequently asked questions to deepen the discussion and to serve as a frame for practicing different service user interactions through roleplay.
- Practice how to communicate uncertainty in results and help your trainee become comfortable saying that they do not know.

Suggestions continued...

- Take some time to review conversations that may not come up as frequently but are important to be prepared for, including:
 - How to communicate to a client when you are sending a sample to confirmatory testing, and how/when the client can access those results
 - What to say to a client if it is possible that you will be sending an alert request based on the findings in their sample

Part 5 Knowledge and Skills Checklist

At the end of Part 5, the trainee can

- ☐ Describe the purpose of the DCBC database and how to navigate it
- ☐ Demonstrate how to navigate through the DCBC data base, from sign in to entry data fields
- ☐ Describe when and how to send a drug alert or public report
- ☐ Describe common data entry errors and ways to avoid them
- ☐ Demonstrate how to communicate results with service users
- ☐ Communicate harm reduction messaging when providing results
- ☐ Respond appropriately to complex questions from service users

PART 6: WORKING AS A DRUG CHECKER

Your role in this section is to help your trainee practice the workflow of a drug check while communicating with service users, navigating technology-related tasks of analysis, and following safe workplace practices. This is a chance for trainees get the opportunity to refine their skills and practice working as a drug checker, from the start to the end of a shift.

We recommend that trainees have a minimum of 10 hours practicing working as a drug checking technician with your supervision, though this section is likely to need to be flexible in terms of time spent. You will need to monitor and provide them with regular feedback on what they are doing well and how they can improve their skills and workflow as they work through challenging or complex situations.

Overview

Drug Checking From Start to Finish

Your trainee's hours of practice are meant to be spent on working with client submitted samples and providing results, other work, learning, and practice is extremely valuable but does not substitute for time spent working directly with clients. It is also important that as a trainer you are paying close attention to your trainee during this time, listening to their conversations with clients, watching their analysis process, and ensuring their results are accurate.

Your role as a trainer is to provide your trainee with opportunities to practice the full range of skills required in a typical drug check, and challenge them with situations that increase in complexity.

- ☐ Review drug checking workflow
- ☐ Monitor and mentor your trainee as needed
- ☐ Offer opportunities for the trainee to practice scenarios that increase in complexity
- ☐ Shadow the trainee while they conduct a drug check from beginning to end, noting their interpersonal and analysis skills

Suggestions

- Ask your trainee to summarize the main steps involved in a typical drug check. If needed, refer to the '7 steps of drug checking' from the online introductory course:
 1. Set up the workstation with all the necessary supplies for your shift.
 2. Greet each respective service user and explain the drug checking process and limitations to them.
 3. Perform the drug check using both the FTIR and test strips.
 4. Record the results into the database.
 5. Give the results to the service user, along with any corresponding harm reduction information.
 6. Return the sample to the service user, or dispose of it safely, if unwanted.
 7. Properly clean and take down the workstation at the end of the shift.
- Roleplay various scenarios to ensure your trainee feels comfortable with common situations. Provide feedback each time. You will need to practice with many types of spectra and scenarios to prepare your trainee for the practicum exam.

Note: Roleplay does not substitute for time spent practicing with real samples and interacting with clients

Reviewing Self-Care and Wellness Practices

Your role as a trainer is to provide insights into the self-care and wellbeing practices that your trainee can use and ensure that they have access to any relevant organizational resources.

Everyone in the drug checking community or working on the front lines of harm reduction should have strategies in place to ensure they take care of themselves and know who to call for help.

- ☐ Review complex situations around boundaries and working with people who use drugs
- ☐ Provide tips for managing complex situations, including maintaining boundaries and practicing self-care
- ☐ Revisit where and when to lean on services and resources while practicing as a technician

Suggestions

- Discuss more examples of complex scenarios, this time considering the potential impact of these interactions on the drug checker. Exchange ideas about what some interactions might feel like, and take time to unpack why they might feel that way.
- Share anecdotes and your own strategies for self-care and maintaining balance.

Identifying and Addressing Gaps in Knowledge or Skills

Your role as a trainer is to assess your trainee's knowledge and skills in relation to the final exam, and discuss next steps. This should include the trainee's own self-reflection on areas that they feel require more practice before taking their exam or areas where they feel they are excelling.

- ☐ Review areas of uncertainty and/or skills in need of further practice
- ☐ Check in with trainee to review any identified knowledge gaps and create a plan to move forward

Suggestion

- Ask your trainee how they feel about their knowledge and skill level. Ask them to identify the areas they think need improvement. Then share your thoughts about their readiness for the final exam. Use the Knowledge and Skills Checklist to guide the discussion.

Part 6 Knowledge and Skills Checklist

At the end of Part 6, the trainee can

- ☐ Demonstrate the entire drug checking workflow, including service procedures, communications, and operation of technologies
- ☐ Monitor the quality of the drug checking results and identify any potential problems with sample analysis
- ☐ Navigate a variety of complex testing situations (e.g., a tricky sample, challenging service user)
- ☐ Respond to common questions and situations with service users
- ☐ List ways they practice self-care and things they can do when they need help

PART 7: TESTING AND CERTIFICATION

Once your trainee has completed the mandatory 30-50 hours of practical experience and demonstrated all the required knowledge and skills, they must pass the practical exam to receive their certificate and work as a certified drug checking technician.

It is important that both you and your trainee feel confident that, once the exam is completed successfully, your trainee will be able to work independently as a drug checking technician.

You can help to maximize your trainee's chances of success by clearly explaining the exam process and giving them practice tests and other opportunities to finetune their knowledge and skills.

Curriculum Overview

Discussing the Final Exam and Follow-Up Process

Your trainee may remember some things about the exam process from conversations during orientation about the scope and sequence of the practicum. Your role as the trainer is to provide information about the final exam, the path to certification, and the follow-up support available from the BCCSU and drug checking community as a whole.

About the Exams

There are 2 exams in the drug checking technician training program. The theory exam which consists of 30 multiple-choice, true or false, and select all questions. This exam should take approximately 45 minutes to complete and should be done before the technician enters the independent practice phase of their practicum.

The second exam is the practical exam. In this part of the exam the trainee will have to evaluate 5 spectra and provide results of their analysis. They will also answer 5 short answer written questions that will evaluate some of their broader knowledge on topics that are difficult to grasp.

Exam Results

You can tell your trainee that their exams will be sent to the BCCSU Training Coordinator for marking. Typically, within 1-2 days training coordinator will return the results. At that time, you will be able to go over the written exam results and feedback with your trainee.

Trainees who pass the exam will receive their certificate by email. At this point they will also receive an invitation to the provincial slack channel and technician working group if they haven't already.

If your trainee fails one or both sections of the exam, you can discuss next steps with them. These may include additional training hours and studying before retaking the exam or working with the BCCSU training coordinator to address gaps in knowledge.

After the Exam

If possible within your work responsibilities, we encourage all trainers to check in on trainees on a regular basis after they begin working in the field to ensure that everything is going smoothly and to clarify any areas of uncertainty or support that they may need as they gain more experience. If you are not able to continue supporting directly we encourage you to connect your trainee to any regional or provincial resources such as a regional drug checking lead, the BCCSU drug checking team, and/or other technicians in surrounding areas.

Suggestions

- Talk to your trainee about the components of the testing process and schedule a date and time for both the written and practical exams. You may also want to book a follow-up meeting to discuss the results and next steps.
- Offer your trainee practice exam questions to work through, and other opportunities to prepare for both exams.

APPENDIX A

Technician Knowledge & Skills Checklist

This tool is design to be used by those that have completed the trainer the trainer course at the BCCSU and should be used in conjunction with the trainer manual as a whole.

Once the Intro Course is completed, the trainee will be given a login to the BCCSU online learning platform to log their practicum training requirements (eg. skills/parts completed), get access to learning resources, and any additional learning modules (to be completed during practicum).

Pre-practicum check-in

- ☐ First, trainers will schedule an informal check-in with trainees to discuss trainee strengths, learning style, limitations, availability, motivations to become a technician, etc.
- ☐ Create a schedule for the practicum schedule and when the requirements will be completed

Part 1: Getting started (~3 hrs)

Trainer Curriculum Activities/Outputs	Trainee Learning Objectives Checklist
1. Introduction to technician resources ☐ Walk through the practicum handbook, featuring all the information needed to understand flow, key skills, and expectations of practicum, testing process, etc. ☐ Explain how to track skills/requirements for the practicum on the course platform ☐ Provide additional general resources for trainees to read/ support their learning throughout practicum (BCCSU Website, DRED, Toronto Drug Dictionary) 2. Site tour ☐ Tour trainees around facility/testing site (may change based on context/location of the training) ☐ Introduce trainee to other staff, if applicable	☐ Describe some of the history and context of drug checking in BC ☐ Describe the layout of the drug checking site and what to expect working in that location ☐ Describe/demonstrate knowledge on information specific to the drug checking site (important staff members, hours of operation, where to find policy and practicum information)

Continued...

3. Administrative duties

- ☐ Review site policies
- ☐ Discuss paperwork (UPHNS/Confirmatory paperwork, plus any internal tracking/collection forms/results forms)

4. Site safety and personal safety

- ☐ Explain/demonstrate emergency protocols
- ☐ Explain general site protocols
- ☐ Walk through Operational Guidance document
- ☐ Demonstrate PPE (what, why, how to wear)
- ☐ Discuss the importance of PPE, and self-care related to safety
- ☐ Demonstrate how to safely/properly collect, receive, process and dispose of samples

- ☐ Describe/demonstrate site safety and emergency procedures
- ☐ Describe the importance of PPE and safety on the job
- ☐ Describe/demonstrate how to wear required PPE
- ☐ Explain/demonstrate safety risks when working with drug samples and drug checking equipment
- ☐ Know the signs of a drug poisoning and how to respond to a suspected drug poisoning
- ☐ Explain/demonstrate how to properly handle and dispose of samples
- ☐ Access resources to support drug checking practice (e.g., colleagues/trainer, manuals, online resources)

Part 2: A person-centered service (*minimum 3 hrs*)

Trainer Curriculum Activities/Outputs

Trainee Learning Objectives Checklist

1. Understanding context of drug checking/harm reduction

- ☐ Emphasize purpose of drug checking services (i.e., response to public health crisis)
- ☐ Review history of drug checking (i.e., started as nightlife service...) and why/how drug checking became part of the overall picture of harm reduction
- ☐ Use BCCSU resources to discuss principles of non-judgement and all other key facets of harm reduction

2. Understanding service users

- ☐ Discuss why people use drugs and different kinds of drug use (poly-substance users, opioid, party drugs, etc.)
- ☐ Discuss commonalities of people who uses drug checking services and why
- ☐ Explain how can drug checking services help folks (beyond the obvious)
- ☐ Explore key concepts/issues when working with people who use drugs

- ☐ Describe how and why drug checking is a harm reduction strategy and service
- ☐ Describe who uses drug checking services and why
- ☐ Explain how to approach communications and interactions with service users
- ☐ Articulate the information provided to service users prior to checking their drugs
- ☐ Harm reduction messaging
- ☐ Description of the process
- ☐ Limitations of drug checking

Continued...

3. Connecting with service users and working with samples

- ☐ Discuss place and purpose of harm reduction-related messaging as part of the service
- ☐ Demonstrate different ways to connect to clients
- ☐ Invite trainees to practice making connections through role play
- ☐ Demonstrate how to work with service users when receiving, collecting, and processing samples

4. Understanding and communicating limitations of drug checking services

- ☐ Emphasize what technicians can and cannot do; what technologies can and cannot do
- ☐ Demonstrate different ways to communicate limitations to clients
- ☐ Invite trainees to practice making communicate limitations through role play

5. Outlining technician responsibilities, boundaries, and self-care

- ☐ Explore technician's role in providing a harm reduction service (what they are and are not liable/responsible for)
- ☐ Discuss how to care for oneself (burnout, service user relationships, etc.)

6. Building community

- ☐ Discuss the value of joining a community of drug-checkers (support, ongoing learning from others with different experiences, etc.)
- ☐ Provide information about current communities

- ☐ Demonstrate different responses to basic common questions service users might have about the process
- ☐ Articulate the role and limitations of a technician and explain the importance of boundaries and mental health
- ☐ Access support at their site and in the technician community of practice and where to locate opportunities to continue learning

Part 3: Using drug checking technologies (*minimum 7 hrs*)

**Trainer Curriculum
Activities/Outputs**

1. Developing drug knowledge

- ☐ Provide information (chart) on common drugs (and nicknames) and drug combinations (in addition to completing drug knowledge module)
- ☐ Discuss drug basics (stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens) and effects when combined

**Trainee Learning
Objectives Checklist**

- ☐ Define the basic categories of drugs
- ☐ List names and nicknames of commonly used drugs seen in drug checking

Continued...

2. Setting up (and cleaning up) workstation

- ☐ Review tools, technologies, workstation supplies
- ☐ Demonstrate setting up & taking down workstation
- ☐ Invite trainees to practice setting up & taking down workstation
- ☐ Review FTIR care practices & transportation (if needed)
- ☐ Review calibration (PQ test)

3. Collecting, handling and returning samples

- ☐ Review best practices for working with samples
- ☐ Demonstrate collecting, handling and returning samples
- ☐ Invite trainees to practice collecting, handling and returning samples

4. How to use test strips

- ☐ Review use/benefits of test strips
- ☐ Demonstrate using/reading test strips
- ☐ Invite trainees to practice using/interpreting test strips
- ☐ Address common challenges using test strips

5. How to use the FTIR

- ☐ Review use/benefits of FTIR
- ☐ Review limitations of FTIR (from part 2)
- ☐ Demonstrate using the FTIR
 - ☐ How to plate a sample
 - ☐ Adjusting the anvil pressure
- ☐ Invite trainees to practice using the FTIR
- ☐ Demonstrate cleaning and caring for the FTIR (between samples and between shifts)
- ☐ Invite trainees to practice cleaning and caring for the FTIR
- ☐ Address common challenges with using the FTIR

6. How to understand results of FTIR using OPUS

- ☐ Review libraries, pros and cons of each type, and why/when to use combinations
- ☐ Demonstrate performing subtractive analysis and reading results
- ☐ Invite trainees to practice performing subtractive analysis and reading results
- ☐ Address common challenges understanding results and using OPUS

- ☐ Identify key resources containing detailed drug knowledge
- ☐ List the items needed to set up a workstation
- ☐ Demonstrate how to pack/unpack supplies and set up/take down the workstation
- ☐ Demonstrate how to receive samples from service users
- ☐ Demonstrate how to safely and effectively handle samples
- ☐ Demonstrate how to return the sample to the service user
- ☐ Explain why we use test strips (what they can and cannot tell us)
- ☐ Demonstrate how to use test strips
- ☐ Demonstrate how to read results of test strips
- ☐ Demonstrate how to assemble/disassemble the FTIR correctly
- ☐ Demonstrate the steps to set up and operate the FTIR machine for a drug check
- ☐ Demonstrate how to load a sample onto the FTIR and scan it
- ☐ Demonstrate how to perform subtractive analysis using the OPUS
- ☐ Understand the different libraries available for drug checking and when to use them
- ☐ Understand when to stop the analysis
- ☐ Demonstrate how to clean the FTIR between samples

Mid-practicum check-in

- ☐ Trainee & trainer mid-practicum check-in to discuss and gauge the trainees skills and knowledge so far
- ☐ Trainee completes the theory exam and receives feedback from BCCSU Training Coordinator
- ☐ Trainee & trainer identify together areas of strength/weakness and make a plan for the remainder of the practicum

Part 4: Understanding drugs and common drug mixtures (*minimum 4 hrs*)

1. Reviewing common drugs and drug combinations

- ☐ Review chart of common drugs and drug combinations (from Part 3)
- ☐ Discuss resources available to help stay up to date on current drug supply
- ☐ Discuss where to find information drugs and mixtures (tripsit, psychonaut wiki, etc.)

2. Introduction to mixture analysis with the FTIR

- ☐ Discuss use/benefits and limitations of mixture analysis
- ☐ Demonstrate various examples of mixture analysis
- ☐ Invite trainees to practice performing mixture analysis and reading results

- ☐ Articulate the importance of staying up to date on the drug supply and where to find current drug information
- ☐ Describe common drug combinations and their effects
- ☐ Describe the purpose, benefits and limitations of mixture analysis
- ☐ Explain the limitations of mixture analysis
- ☐ Demonstrate how to perform a mixture analysis using OPUS
 - ☐ Know when it is appropriate to attempt mixture analysis
 - ☐ Understand how to interpret mixture analysis results
 - ☐ Communicate the findings from mixture analysis to clients appropriately

Part 5: Sharing and recording results (*minimum 3 hrs*)

1. How to record findings in DCBC

- ☐ Review purpose and process of using the DCBC database (why, how, where to find things)
- ☐ Demonstrate how to use DCBC
- ☐ Invite trainees to practice recording information in DCBC
- ☐ Discuss tips on avoiding common errors
- ☐ Demonstrate how and when to send out drug alerts and record specific entries:
 - ☐ Adverse events
 - ☐ Multiple fent analogs
 - ☐ Determining expected

2. How to share results with service users and harm reduction information

- ☐ Demonstrate what to say to share results
- ☐ Invite trainees to practice sharing results through role play
- ☐ Explore frequently asked questions from service users around drug checking process and drug results

- ☐ Describe the purpose of the DCBC database and how to navigate it
- ☐ Demonstrate how to navigate through the DCBC data base, from sign in to entry data fields
- ☐ Describe when and how to send a drug alert or public report
- ☐ Describe common data entry errors and ways to avoid them
- ☐ Demonstrate how to communicate results with service users
- ☐ Communicate harm reduction messaging when providing results
- ☐ Respond appropriately to complex questions from service users

Part 6: Working as a drug checker (*minimum 10 hrs*)

1. Hands-on practice of drug checking workflow

- ☐ Invite trainees to practice workflow from start to finish (“shift” scenarios)
- ☐ Monitor and mentor trainee as needed
- ☐ Offer opportunities for trainees to practice scenarios that increase in complexity (particularly including mixture analysis)
- ☐ Provide tips for managing complex situations, including tricky samples and challenging service users

2. Reviewing self-care and mental health practices for technicians

- ☐ Discuss complex situations around boundaries and working with people who use drugs
- ☐ Revisit where and when to lean on services and resources while practicing as a technician

3. Identifying and addressing gaps in knowledge or skills

- ☐ Review areas of uncertainty and/or skills in need of further practice
- ☐ Check-in with trainee and trainer to review any knowledge gaps identified and create a plan to move forward

- ☐ Demonstrate the entire drug checking workflow, including service procedures, communications, and operation of technologies
- ☐ Monitor the quality of the drug checking results and identify any potential problems with sample analysis
- ☐ Navigate a variety of complex testing situations (e.g., a tricky sample, challenging service user)
- ☐ Respond to common questions and situations with service users
- ☐ List ways they practice self-care and things they can do when they need help

Final Practicum check-in

- ☐ Trainer and trainee check-in to evaluate trainee confidence, knowledge and skills related to the evaluation checklist
- ☐ Determine if more shifts/practice is required in certain skills before completing the final evaluation

Part 7: Testing and certification

1. Discuss final exam and follow-up process

- ☐ Provide details about exam (how to access, length, time, rules, etc.)
- ☐ Explain that exam results are sent directly to BCCSU
- ☐ Explain when/how trainer will go over results and practicum feedback with trainee
- ☐ Explain when/how trainees will receive their certificate (if they pass)
- ☐ Explain that trainers will continue to be available to trainees after they start work as a drug checker (implement a 2-month post-practicum check-in).

2. Trainee performs final exam

APPENDIX B

Pre-Practicum Check-in

This tool is design to be used by those that have completed the trainer the trainer course at the BCCSU and should be used in conjunction with the trainer manual as a whole.

Prior to beginning a practicum, we recommend that you and your trainee spend some time setting expectations and creating a plan for how the hours will get completed.

1. Learn about the trainee

Use some or all of the questions below to understand and assess your trainee's background and learning needs.

- a. Reflecting on your personal history and interests, what made you want to become a drug checking technician?
- b. What skills, experiences and/or strengths do you have that are relevant to drug checking?
- c. Do you have experience working with people who use drugs?
- d. What skills are you most excited about developing during your practicum? Why?
- e. What do you think are your weakest areas of knowledge or skill related to drug checking? Why?
- f. How would you describe your learning style? Give examples.
- g. Do you have strategies for handling difficult situations, stress, or emotionally challenging work?
- h. How do you best receive feedback? Discuss how this might look in the context of the practicum
- i. What is your availability? (In the ideal world, how would you schedule your 30 – 50 hours of practical experience?)
- j. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

2. Create a training plan/schedule

Take some time given the information you have gathered from the trainee to make a training plan of when and how you will facilitate their practicum and share that plan with the trainee.

APPENDIX C

Mid-Practicum Check-in

This tool is design to be used by those that have completed the trainer the trainer course at the BCCSU and should be used in conjunction with the trainer manual as a whole.

After a minimum of 20 hours of practicum hours your trainee will take the theory exam administered by the BCCSU. This is designed to be a point where you and your trainee can evaluate how the practicum is going and if there are gaps in learning and where those gaps are and create a plan to address them.

In addition to using the exam below are some questions and activities that may assist in planning the remaining practicum hours:

1. With the trainee, review the Skills and Knowledge Checklists (from Parts 1-3) to identify any gaps in their knowledge or skills.
2. Discuss how confident the trainee is feeling with their knowledge and skills, and identify any areas of strength or weakness. You may also want to identify with the trainee any areas to work on or next steps for the rest of the practicum.
3. Ask the trainee where they feel most confident and what they would like to work on.
4. Review any samples that proved to be specifically challenging to analyze or take time to debrief any challenging client situations and create plans for the future.
5. Reflect on the practicum so far and identify which strategies are working best for your trainee so that you can focus on those strategies for the remaining hours.

This is also a good opportunity for you to look forward at the content you have remaining to cover and see if there are things from the first part of the practicum that can be integrated in the rest of the practicum

You may also take this time to revisit anything discussed in terms of learner needs during the pre-practicum check-in ensure they are successful trainees.



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