

The pace of technological advance continues to accelerate as we move forward into the new century. New developments make the work of the pharmacy professional both easier and more accurate as time goes on. It can be tempting to rely completely upon these technological innovations, but if history is any guide pharmacists must also be able to use older methods in case of setbacks or emergencies. The training and education of pharmacy professionals must include some of the more time-tested methods if they are to be considered complete.

The education of a pharmacist can be difficult. Many pharmacy professionals consider their undergraduate work to have been a breeze compared to what they went through in pharmacy school. Some report that though the level of difficulty is not any greater, the sheer volume of material that must be learned is daunting. Time management is of paramount importance in pharmacy school.

One area where an older method of training can be valuable is in the field of compounding. Compounding is a major activity of the modern pharmacy. Successfully combining two or more substances to a very accurate degree takes effort and concentration. It is tempting to rely upon the modern digital balances for compounding. It is certainly easier, and since the relaxation of Handbook 44 regulations in the late 1990s it is legal.

However, for generations compounding pharmacists have relied upon analog balances such as the Torbal DRX-3 for their work. These balances have been the standard for compounding pharmacies across the country; it is not unusual to look behind the counter at a compounding pharmacy and find a DRX that has been in service for decades.

Pharmacy schools have trained their students for a great many years on these balances. It is important that all pharmacists, no matter what age or generation, know how to use these devices. The basics of compounding should be taught on analog balances. In a compounding pharmacy, if there is a situation in which an electronic balance ceases to function, or is otherwise unavailable for use, and an analog balance is the only one available, guess what? The pharmacist **MUST** be able to use the analog balance, or else the pharmacy cannot dispense compounded substances. Customers rely upon the pharmacist to get them their medications as soon as they need them. Time can be an important and sometimes dangerous factor. A properly trained pharmacist must be ready for any contingency, and the ability to use an analog compounding balance is an important part of that readiness.