

White Paper

Is Your Employment Drug Testing Outdated?

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Is Your Employment Drug Testing Outdated?

Abusers Have Adapted

The Department of Transportation set the gold standard for drug testing more than 15 years ago—the standard 5 panel which consists of Amphetamines, Marijuana, Cocaine, Opiates and PCP.

The industry has evolved not only in terms of the substances and methods that we use but the abusers have adapted as well. For example, when you type in the phrase “how to beat a drug test” on the Internet you will get over a million hits. Various entrepreneurs have creatively started new businesses by selling products and gimmicks that promise to help a person pass their drug test.

In addition, the drugs of choice that are being abused are changing. Several years ago the club drug Ecstasy entered the spotlight as a new drug of choice and non-medical use of prescription drugs is at an all time high, second only to marijuana use as the most prevalent category of drug abuse, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

5-Panel Not Best Practice Any More

The 5-panel test no longer is best practice. In the past, additional testing simply resulted in being overturned by the Medical Review Officer verifying a legitimate medical explanation for a prescription medication.

That outdated view has changed particularly in healthcare. Positions that allow access to prescription medications need to be addressed in a drug screening strategy, i.e. pharmacists, doctors, assistants.

Family prescription medication is also easily accessible. Something new that young people are doing is called a “pharm party”. This is when everyone pulls together all the medication they can find at home and dump it into a bowl for random consumption.

Eric Hess writes in his letter from the Chairman article in the October issue of FOCUS, a DATIA publication, “according to Rxlist data, in 2005 hydrocodone was prescribed three times more frequently than any other controlled substance. And, hydrocodone and oxycodone were the most frequently encountered analgesic narcotics in submissions to federal, state and local labs by a two-thirds majority according to 2007 mid-year report data from STRIDE/ National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS).”

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Hydrocodone and oxycodone are considered synthetic or man made opiates. They are not tested for in the standard five panel. The standard five panel tests for natural opiates like codeine, morphine and heroin. Also, Ecstasy (MDMA) is an amphetamine but is not part of a standard 5 panel test either. It requires adding on an additional test.

The following data from Quest Diagnostics illustrates the increase in positivity for Oxycodone.

Positivity Rates By Drug Category

(For General U.S. Workforce, as a percentage of all such tests)

(More than 6.6 million tests from January to December 2007)

Drug Category	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003
Amphetamines	0.44%	0.42%	0.48%	0.52%	0.49%
Barbiturates	0.24%	0.23%	0.25%	0.27%	0.29%
Benzodiazepines	0.67%	0.62%	0.58%	0.58%	0.60%
Cocaine	0.58%	0.72%	0.70%	0.72%	0.74%
Marijuana	2.34%	2.38%	2.54%	2.88%	2.96%
Methadone	0.23%	0.22%	0.23%	0.21%	0.20%
Opiates	0.35%	0.32%	0.32%	0.32%	0.34%
Oxycodones	0.88% ¹	0.64% ²	0.56% ³	--	--
PCP	0.02%	0.01%	0.02%	0.01%	0.03%
Propoxyphene	0.58%	0.55%	0.57%	0.63%	0.67%

¹More than 500,000 tests

²Approximately 400,000 tests

³More than 200,000 tests

Source: www.questdiagnostics.com

Barbiturates and Benzodiazepines are two other additional drugs that can cause abuse and/or impairment. Barbiturates act as a central nervous system depressant. They are widely used for seizure disorders and in combination with other drugs to treat headaches and gastrointestinal problems. Benzodiazepines are considered tranquilizers. More information about drug classes are detailed in the April 2008 issue of FOCUS.

New Best Practice: Expanded panel tests

Medtox, one of LexisNexis® laboratory partners reports that the 11 panel instant cup is their second best seller in their line of diagnostic devices, while the 8 panel is the third best seller. They have found that new clients coming on board want to test the highest panel possible.

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To be clear, a Medical Review Officer (MRO) is critical to the drug testing process. A MRO is a certified expert that reviews whatever substance is found in a person's test sample. Certainly a person may have a legitimate medical explanation for having a substance in their system. A MRO can also determine if the medication could pose a safety risk in a safety sensitive position.

Evaluate the type of panel being tested for and to review trends in the industry to ensure the integrity of your products and services and safety of our workplaces.

The following table illustrates what drugs appear in common 5, 8 and 11 panel tests.

Drug Name	Description www.usdoj.gov/dea/concern/concern.htm	5 panel and DOT	8 panel	11 panel
Amphetamines	Amphetamine was first marketed in the 1930s as Benzedrine® in an over-the-counter inhaler to treat nasal congestion. By 1937, amphetamine was available by prescription in tablet form and was used in the treatment of the sleeping disorder, narcolepsy, and the behavioral syndrome called minimal brain dysfunction, which today is called Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). During World War II, amphetamine was widely used to keep the fighting men going and both dextroamphetamine (Dexedrine®) and methamphetamine (Methedrine®) were readily available. Methamphetamine is a highly addictive drug with potent central nervous system stimulant properties.	X	X	X
Marijuana	Marijuana is the most commonly abused illicit drug in the United States.	X	X	X
Cocaine	Cocaine is a powerfully addictive stimulant that directly affects the brain. It can be administered by a doctor for legitimate medical uses, such as local anesthesia for some eye, ear, and throat surgeries.	X	X	X
Opiates	Codeine, Morphine and Heroin. Heroin is an illegal, highly addictive drug. It is both the most abused and the most rapidly acting of the opiates. Today, heroin is an illicit substance having no medical utility in the United States.	X	X	X
Phencyclidine (PCP)	Originally designed as a human anesthetic and later produced only as a veterinary anesthetic, PCP is no longer produced or used for legitimate purposes.	X	X	X
Ecstasy	MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine) is a synthetic, psychoactive drug chemically similar to the stimulant methamphetamine and the hallucinogen mescaline.		X	X
Barbiturates	Barbiturates produce a wide spectrum of central nervous system depression, from mild sedation to coma, and have been used as sedatives, hypnotics, anesthetics, and anticonvulsants.		X	X

Drug Name	Description www.usdoj.gov/dea/concern/concern.htm	5 panel and DOT	8 panel	11 panel
Benzodiazepines	The benzodiazepine family of depressants is used therapeutically to produce sedation, induce sleep, relieve anxiety and muscle spasms, and to prevent seizures. In general, benzodiazepines act as hypnotics in high doses, anxiolytics in moderate doses, and sedatives in low doses.		X	X
Methadone	Although chemically unlike morphine or heroin, methadone produces many of the same effects. Introduced into the United States in 1947 as an analgesic (Dolophinel), it is primarily used today for the treatment of narcotic addiction.			X
Oxycodone	OxyContin® is a prescription painkiller used for moderate to high pain relief associated with injuries, bursitis, dislocations, fractures, neuralgia, arthritis, lower back pain, and pain associated with cancer. OxyContin contains oxycodone, the medication's active ingredient, in a timed-release tablet. Oxycodone products have been illicitly abused for the past 30 years.			X
Propoxyphene	Propoxyphene is used to relieve mild to moderate pain.			X

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drug screening process?
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