

Why psychiatrists should drug test?



In spite of the progress made in treatment of psychiatric disorders during the last few decades, non adherence to medication is the most common cause of therapeutic failure. Utilizing a compliance based medication monitoring program, also known as urine drug testing, to ensure the patient is following their treatment plan and taking their prescribed medications at the correct dose is an essential safeguard for your patients and practice.

Urine drug testing (UDT) provides objective information to assist in identifying the presence or absence of drugs or drug classes in the body and making treatment decisions. A presumptive drug screen is used to detect the presence of a drug in the body. A blood or urine sample may be used. However, urine is the best specimen for presumptive screening, as blood is relatively insensitive for many common drugs, including psychotropic agents, opioids, and stimulants.

There are no scientific tests to prove the presence of a psychiatric disorder. Instead, a diagnosis of a mental illness is based purely on professional expertise, evaluation of symptoms, and often without obtaining medical history from corroborating sources. Initiating a urine drug screening protocol with your patients can assist with:

- 1. A complete psychiatric assessment** – Drug test results can help psychiatrists conduct a more thorough and accurate assessment and pave the way to an effective treatment plan.
- 2. Monitor ongoing issues with addiction** - Similar to chronic pain drug testing, doctors can utilize these drug tests to make sure patients are following medical advice.
- 3. Diagnose possible co-existing disorders** – Substance abuse and psychiatric disorders often co- exist, and determining the appropriate course of action is essential for successful treatment. According to studies, nearly one-third of mentally ill patients have abused substances, and over one-third of alcohol abusers and more than half of drug abusers have been diagnosed with at least one serious mental condition. Psychiatrists who understand all the variables up front will correctly assess when a dual diagnosis is warranted.

Psychiatric Drug Testing Is in Your Best Interest

A psychiatric assessment that does not reflect results from a drug test can lead to complications that patients and psychiatrists both want to avoid.

1. **Misdiagnosis** – For one, without factoring in evidence of drug use, a psychiatrist may misdiagnose a mental illness based on witnessing side effects from illegal or prescription drugs.
2. **Exposure to psychiatric medications with serious side effects** – More concerning, misdiagnosis can lead to treatment prescribed for a nonexistent mental illness, and expose a person to psychiatric medications with a known list of side effects that may pose certain health risks. Some psycho stimulants, for example, are known to have caused mania, psychosis, depression, heart attack, stroke, and, in extremes cases where a preexisting heart condition may be present, even sudden death. In fact, some medications are just as powerful or addictive as illegal drugs like heroin, crack cocaine or meth.
3. **Medical complications** – Furthermore, patients using prescription medications or illegal drugs in combination with psychiatric drugs could experience additional, unforeseen side effects that misinform their diagnosis if all the contributing factors remain unknown.

Benefits Of Establishing A Medication Compliance Program

The health risks for patients are significant when undetected drug use leads to a misdiagnosis and a potentially harmful course of drug treatment. Accurate assessments with all of the relevant factors disclosed inform psychiatrists on how they can most safely and effectively help patients with their mental health concerns

1. Controlled drugs can be useful in helping people if used with caution
2. When misused, controlled drugs cause harm that far exceeds their usefulness
4. Controlled drug abuse is common, and these drugs are commonly diverted illegally.
5. The prescription monitoring system only goes so far. Medications obtained from family, friends, over the internet, or from the street, won't show up as a prescription.

An established medication compliance program supports patients and healthcare providers on multiple fronts. From evaluating and treating first-time patients to monitoring an ongoing treatment plan to ensure your patients are using the prescribed medications safely and responsibly. By evaluating medication adherence, and identifying undisclosed substances that may interfere with a treatment plan or affect patient safety; clinicians are better armed to advocate for their patients, and to detect potential drug abuse and/or diversion.