



Safe Use of Prescriptions at Work

Brian D. Harrison, MD

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To work safely, you must respect both edges of the two-edged sword of prescription medication. The right prescription, taken 100 percent as prescribed, can cut the disabling effects of disease, improving work attendance and performance. But taken incorrectly, drugs can cut into workplace safety! This especially matters to commercial drivers, whose safety affects the general driving public. So, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has done good work to educate drivers and their employers, most lately with a new website:

<http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/rules-regulations/topics/medical/medical-inner.aspx>



I like this so much I've modified part of it slightly (see below), to make it useful for educating those who do any type of safety-sensitive work. If you like it too, consider distributing it among your workforce.

I find it ironic that "good guy" prescription medicines, just like "wicked-sister" street drugs, can threaten workplace safety. But since "good drugs" can "go wrong," some companies include extensive testing for prescription medications in employment-related drug screens. For example, medications for anxiety, depression, and pain may get thrown in the same hopper as marijuana and cocaine. Don't make this mistake! This approach doesn't get the job done. Screens that show prescribed medications simply get down-graded to negative, as long as the employee has a legitimate prescription. That doesn't improve safety. And some employees probably erroneously stop taking medications they ought to take, fearing a positive drug test.

Instead, the better policies I've seen require employees to report any prescription to the plant nurse if of a type that could affect work safety. I'm sure this improves safety. This method doesn't discourage them from taking medications they need. In fact, the nurse can aid compliance, especially to ensure the employee takes it correctly and safely. And nurses protect confidentiality. Companies who lack their own nurse can contract for this service from an agency or clinic. My clinic provides this service.

But, I suspect all companies that take this commendable approach still realize that medications are vastly under-reported. If your company is one, consider sending this document* (entitled "FMCSA Medication Safety") to all employees, with your own short intro paragraph reminding them of this requirement, if your policy requires it. Reassure employees you're there to help and to protect both their safety and their confidentiality.

*Find the document here:

<http://www.affinityhealth.org/object/services-specialty-occupational-blog-safe-prescriptions-FMCSA.html>