

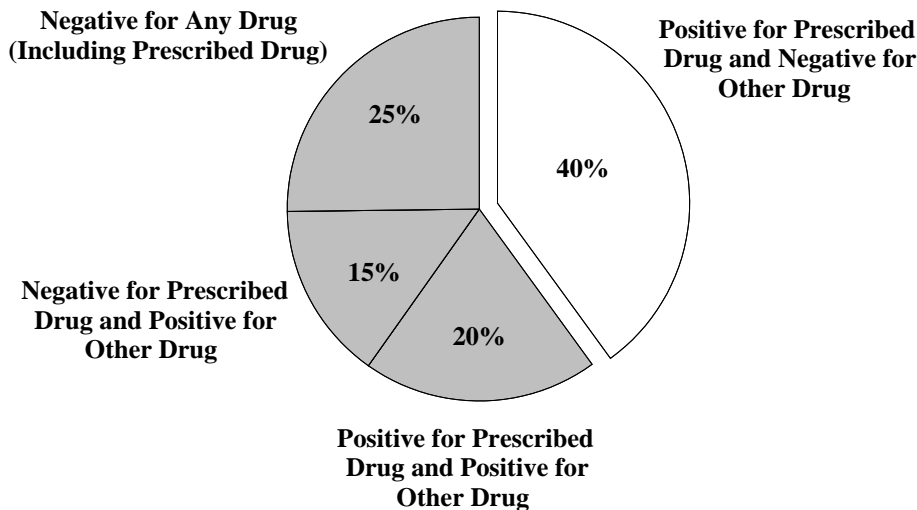
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Lab Test Results Suggest Majority of Patients Do Not Take Prescription Drugs as Prescribed

A large percentage of patients do not take their prescription drugs as prescribed, according to data from Quest Diagnostics prescription drug monitoring service. Of 151,405 urine test results from patients referred by their physicians for drug testing in 2012, 40% tested positive only for the drugs that were prescribed for them. The remaining 60% of specimens had inconsistent results, suggesting that the patient misused their medication in one of three ways: 1) by not using the prescribed drug (those testing negative for any drug, 25%); 2) by using other drugs instead (those testing negative for prescribed drugs and positive for other drugs, 15%); or 3) by combining the prescribed drug with other drugs (those testing positive for both prescribed and other drugs, 20%). According to the authors, “each of the three patterns of misuse has the potential to put a patient’s health at risk. A patient who does not take a prescribed drug will not receive potentially efficacious treatment for a medical condition and contributes to healthcare waste. A patient who uses non-prescribed drugs does so without a clinician’s supervision. And a patient who combines drugs without a physician’s guidance increases the potential for dangerous drug combinations” (p. 4).

Percentage of Patients Referred to Quest Diagnostics Laboratories for Drug Testing by Their Physicians Testing Positive and Negative for Drugs Prescribed for Them, 2012



NOTE: The Quest Diagnostics prescription drug monitoring service tests for up to 26 commonly prescribed and abused drugs, including pain medications, central nervous system medications and amphetamines, as well as certain illicit drugs, such as marijuana and cocaine. Data presented here include results of 1) testing services ordered by physicians (such as family practitioners and internists) serving patients in a primary care setting; 2) testing services ordered by specialists that may be expected to use Quest’s prescription drug monitoring services (such as psychiatrists and neurologists); and 3) patients under care at pain management clinics and hospitals. Data do not include results of patients tested by drug rehabilitation clinics or those receiving treatment from clinicians focused on drug addiction, given the unusually high rates of drug inconsistency expected within this clinical segment.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from Quest Diagnostics, *Prescription Drug Misuse in America: A Report on Marijuana and Prescription Drugs*, 2013. Available online at www.questdiagnostics.com/home/physicians/health-trends/prescription-drug-misuse.