The potential for abuse of controlled substances prescribed for patients in pain management programs is a significant concern among treatment professionals. One recent study evaluating abnormal urine drug screens in patients with chronic pain treated with opioids demonstrated this to be a significant occurrence, reporting that as many as 55% of patients were not taking their prescribed opioid, 39% were taking opioids that were not prescribed, and 46% of the patients were using illicit drugs. Arthur E. Jordan, MD, of Coastal Interventional Pain Associates (Myrtle Beach, SC), is an instructor and a member of the Board of Directors of the American Society of Interventional Pain Physicians (ASIPP). Dr. Jordan contends that “if we know this is happening, then we have a responsibility to try to prevent abuse and diversion, and one of the major ways that we have of doing that is urine drug testing.”

Comprehensive monitoring programs to track patient adherence to treatment have become more widespread. Dr. Jordan recommends that every pain center utilizing pain management should have a urine drug screening program. “It improves patient care, it improves patient compliance, and it prevents diversion and abuse.” Dr. Jordan’s monitoring program combines both on-site instant testing and in-lab testing, recognizing the need for confirmation of screening results—usually by GCMS—which is considered the gold standard in urine drug testing. “When a patient’s urine shows that he or she does not have oxycodone in the urine and I am prescribing oxycodone, I send that patient out to a lab for a GCMS. There is always a small chance of an error and I want the patient’s record to be as accurate as possible, which means we have to be diligent and careful with our treatment and our screening. Essentially, if the initial screening in the office indicates a problem which would cause a change in therapy, then GCMS confirmation is done.”

Collaboration with a toxicology lab can provide a physician with in-depth information that may not otherwise be available to him and Dr. Jordan stresses the importance of establishing such a relationship. “Despite the fact that I’m reasonably knowledgeable about urine drug screening, there are a lot of drug interactions that I don’t know about. This is what these people do every day and they are familiar with drug interactions and false negatives and positives that most doctors won’t even think of.”

Virginia L. Ghafoor, Pharm D, of Fairview Health Services (Minneapolis, MN), agrees that monitoring and identifying all drugs used by their patients, prescription or otherwise, is important in making treatment decisions. Dr. Ghafoor notes, however, that they do not have the capability within their institution to do the level of testing required to monitor their patients and their clinic has become extremely dependent upon the services of a toxicology lab. “We were assuming that our point-of-care testing was thorough enough and did not realize we were unable to catch all of the medications that we needed to.”

“Our company has many years of experience working with pain clinics in helping to administer and interpret drug screening results,” notes Karla Walker, Pharm D, Clinical Lab Director with MEDTOX Laboratories, Inc. (St. Paul, MN). “Pain clinics need to be concerned with both potential for diversion and adverse treatment of pain. Monitoring monitoring improves patient compliance with drug regimens, as well as for illicit drug use, gives pain clinicians a great tool for assessing these issues in individual patients.” Dr. Walker continues, “With the vast menu of tests that we have to offer, we can tailor testing specifically to the needs of pain clinics. More importantly, we offer consultative services with a clinical certifying scientist, myself included, who can help in the interpretation of test results.”

For more than two decades, MEDTOX Laboratories Inc. (St. Paul, MN), has worked with physicians to provide the most comprehensive analytical and consultative services in the industry. MEDTOX has recently adopted the name ToxASSURE™ to describe this service, a name that reflects the confidence and professionalism that MEDTOX offers a pain physician’s practice. For more information about MEDTOX or its ToxASSURE program, please visit their website at www.medtox.com, or call 1-877 838-7189.

References: