

Getting to zero harm in controlled substance prescribing: Increasing the accuracy of prescription compliance monitoring through enhanced drug testing support

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Fatalities due to opioid and other controlled substances have been at an epidemic level and continually increasing over the past five years. CDC data indicates that drug overdoses killed more than 100,000 Americans in 2021, representing a 10% increase over 2020¹. Opioids continue to account for the largest proportion of overdose deaths. As responses to this crisis developed at the national, state, and regional levels, health care institutions were charged with developing local responses to provide safe care for patients, while maintaining compliance with continually evolving legal and regulatory guidelines for opioid prescribing.

As part of the University Hospitals (UH) Pain Management Institute and Department of Pathology's response, an interdisciplinary group convened with the goal of effectively using urine drug testing as a component of safe controlled substance prescribing in this evolving environment. This collaboration included clinical, laboratory, and risk management leaders and sought to increase the ease, accuracy, and confidence with which physicians ordered and interpreted lab testing for controlled substance monitoring. To achieve this goal, inclusive drug test panels were designed, including intuitive naming, built-in reflexes between screening and confirmatory testing, and a comprehensive analytic method to detect commonly prescribed opioids and benzodiazepines. An array of educational materials were also developed to provide guidance on test selection and interpretation, along with the creation of a complementary laboratory toxicology consultation service.

Since implementation of these testing and educational changes, UH has sustainably achieved >98% compliance for the appropriate follow-up of presumptive positive urine drug screens, decreased drug testing costs to patients by 25%, and increased patient convenience by reducing repeat collection for 25% of patients. Additionally, the number of providers ordering and unique patients receiving comprehensive controlled substance testing more than doubled through this program. Clinician compliance with the testing guidelines has increased by 35% with physician's reporting increased confidence in their ability to use drug testing as part of their care for patients prescribed controlled substances. This initiative has enhanced the provision of safe care to patients who are prescribed controlled substances in our health system and on a larger scale contributes to curbing the opioid crisis by reducing the opioid overdose risk in our region.



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1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022). U.S. Overdose Deaths In 2021 Increased Half as Much as in 2020 - But Are Still Up 15%. Access at: [U.S. Overdose Deaths In 2021 Increased Half as Much as in 2020 - But Are Still Up 15% \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/deaths/2021-overdose-deaths)