



Additional employer considerations in Drug Free Workplace Programs (DFWP)

As your company modifies your DFWP to address prescription opioid pain medications, you may want to prepare for and address the following concerns:

Pre-approval of medications: Employees who have returned to work following a positive test are generally restricted from taking any potentially addicting medication as part of their return-to-work agreement. Such drugs most likely would be detected on monitoring drug tests and result in a violation of the return-to-work agreement. However, even successfully rehabilitated employees may experience medical conditions or injuries requiring the limited use of such medications. A procedure for the pre-approval and safe use of these medications on a case-by-case basis needs to be established for monitored employees. The EAP can help design this procedure. In some locales, it is possible to restrict former abusers to a single provider and/or dispenser.

Alternative therapies: Employer health policies that offer evidence-based therapies as alternatives to highly addictive medications may help employees avoid prescription drug abuse and dependency. Such therapies also help employees whose return-to-work agreements restrict use of addicting prescription medications.

Temporary accommodations: An employee who is using a medication that might impair safe performance of his or her duties may be able to safely perform alternative duties. Likewise, an employee violator who has transitioned from primary treatment to continuing treatment may be eligible to return to work but not to their regularly designated position. Alternative work may prove beneficial for both the employer and employee. Ready access to the essential duties of all job descriptions will facilitate medical approval of alternative work accommodations.

Posting essential job duties for each position: Posting the essential job duties for each company position on an employee website provides easy access to this important information. Employees should be encouraged to share their written job duties with their medical providers. The medical provider can then provide the employee with informed guidance about whether any medication prescribed to the employee can be safely used when working.

Physicians and other treatment providers who specialize in addiction medicine: Employers can ask prospective benefit vendors to report on the strength of their provider networks relative to a) prescribing guidelines for management of opioid use and claims, and b) training in, and treatment of prescription drug abuse and other substance use disorders. These providers including injury management health insurers and EAPs, are important resources in preventing and treating prescription drug abuse.

Access to health insurance, sick leave and short-term disability benefits: When an employer terminates an employee rather than offers continuing employment, the separation action will generally result in loss of benefits. An employee may be eligible for COBRA his or her health insurance but, without a paycheck, the COBRA payments may be beyond the employee's ability to pay. In these situations, the Company EAP should be prepared to help separated employees access affordable recovery services and support within the employee's local community.