

Work Related Alcohol & Drug Forum – an Occupational Health (Medical) Perspective

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Background

The Bible

No mention of “Drug” or “Urine”

Multiple references to
“Drunkenness”

Noah. Genesis 9:21



Background (2)

Shakespeare

Hamlet Act 3 Scene 1

b

p



The original quotation

To pee or not to
pee: that is the
question



Issues

- ⌚ Little objective evidence re links between Drugs and Workplace accidents – except for traumatic fatalities
- ⌚ Poor correlation between drug testing results and worker impairment



Issues

- ⌚ Workplace drug tests may actually miss drug users who are under the influence at the time the test is given
- ⌚ Consultative approach needed

Issues of Concern -- 1

- ∞ Invasion of Privacy
- ∞ Interpretation
- ∞ Chain of Custody
- ∞ Consequences of a positive test
- ∞ Workplace design, systems of work, Shiftwork

Issues of Concern -- 2

- ∩ Fatigue
- ∩ Ill health
- ∩ Poly pharmacy
- ∩ Use of poorly validated “devices”
- ∩ International uncertainty re relationship between “presence” of a drug or its metabolite and “impairment”

Employment Outcomes

- ∩ 1990 paper
- ∩ James Ryan, Craig Zwerling
- ∩ Large US Postal worker cohort
- ∩ Pre-employment testing
- ∩ Marijuana use – **NEGATIVE** association
- ∩ Cocaine – no strong association
- ∩ Level of risk ?

Employment Outcomes -- Marijuana

- ∞ Marijuana use – NEGATIVE association
- ∞ Higher labour turnover
- ∞ Increased accidents and injuries
- ∞ More absenteeism
- ∞ More discipline problems

Employment Outcomes -- Cocaine

- ∞ Cocaine use – no strong association with Accidents or Injuries
- ∞ Has level of risk been overestimated ?



Workplace Productivity

- ∩ Impact of drug use uncertain
- ∩ But, Absenteeism positively correlated with drug use
- ∩ Weakness in national and international health and safety statistics
- ∩ Perverse effect of some Safety incentive schemes

Australian Studies (1)

- ∞ 1993 Queensland Mining Council
- ∞ Alcohol – but not Drugs
- ∞ No major published follow up studies

- ∞ Numerous small scale studies -- self reported questionnaires



Findings (1)

- ∞ Admitted pattern of Off-Site drug use in 1-2% of respondents
- ∞ Some associations with on-the-job sleepiness and some types of accidents
- ∞ No validation as yet




Australian Studies (2)

- ∞ 2001 ACARP Study – Fitness for Duty, Issues and Research
- ∞ 6 month study, 80 interviews



Findings (2)

- ⌚ Key finding: Root Cause Analysis is uncommon
- ⌚ Few drug education and awareness programs to help managers manage



Ω POST ACCIDENT -- Drug testing may simplistically focus on presence of drug rather than proper Accident Investigation and Root Cause analysis eg Tap Root program



Employee Assistance Services

- ⌚ See 1999 AFOM publication “Workplace Attendance and Absenteeism”
- ⌚ Most EAPs grew out of old industrial Alcohol and Drug Programs
- ⌚ Factors which limit effectiveness


Conclusions (1)

- ∞ Alcohol – evidence clear re measurement and impairment
- ∞ Drugs – poor quality evidence re effects on safety and productivity
- ∞ Limited role for Drug Screening (safety critical jobs)



Conclusions (2)

- ⌚ Significant funding and research needed
- ⌚ Broad community consultation required
- ⌚ Until consensus reached, remember:



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pee: that is the
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