

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

***Using Urine Specimens from Parolees/Probationers
to Create a Statewide Drug Monitoring System***

Trends in the drugs detected in urinalysis from offenders have been found to provide advance warning of drug epidemics in the greater community. The recent demise of the national ADAM (Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring) program and the Maryland OPUS (Offender Population Urine Screening) program has left Maryland and other states without important tools for forecasting drug epidemics. DEWS staff therefore worked with the Maryland Division of Parole and Probation (DPP) to pilot an innovative program of expanded testing of urine specimens that DPP staff routinely collect from probationers and parolees. DEWS staff over-sampled* drug positive specimens that the DPP Guilford Laboratory† had tested for a panel of five drugs (benzodiazepines, cocaine, marijuana, opiates, and PCP). The study specimens were then sent to an independent, private laboratory who tested them for the presence of more than 30 drugs. Key findings from the pilot study include:

- Almost all (97%) of the probationers/parolees who tested positive for at least one of the drugs in the expanded screen had already tested positive for at least one of the five more common drugs tested for by the DPP. However, the use of some less common drugs, notably buprenorphine, methadone, and oxycodone, would have gone undetected by the DPP's drug screen.
- Sixteen specimens contained oxycodone and 15 specimens contained buprenorphine. About one half of the specimens that contained buprenorphine or oxycodone also contained two or more other drugs, raising the possibility of abuse of these prescription drugs in Maryland.
- Methamphetamine does not appear to be used by this population in the six jurisdictions sampled in Maryland. Only one specimen tested positive for amphetamine and confirmatory testing did not detect methamphetamine.
- The pattern of positive test results for cocaine, PCP, marijuana, and opiates was consistent with the types of drugs for which the general population in the sampled localities sought treatment.
- It was remarkably quick and inexpensive for the researchers to sample 299 specimens and send them to an independent lab to be screened for a wide variety of drugs.

Maryland and other states should consider implementing a program of periodic expanded testing of urine specimens routinely collected from probationers/parolees, not only to ensure that they are routinely testing for the drugs being used by the persons they supervise, but also to provide the state with a tool for rapidly detecting and researching emerging drug problems.

*While about 20% of all specimens screened by DPP tested positive in 2004, 75% of the 299 specimens selected for this study had tested positive in the DPP panel. The number of drugs detected by the expanded testing is therefore higher than would be expected in a random sample of all DPP specimens.

†The Guilford Laboratory is a centralized urinalysis testing facility for 15 DPP collection facilities located in Baltimore City and Baltimore, Howard, Prince George's Charles, and Washington counties.

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