



The alarming cost of opiates in the workplace and what you can do about it

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Data suggests that 33 percent of the opiate painkiller prescriptions funded by employer plans are being abused. The direct and indirect costs associated with employees' use of drugs in the workplace, including opiates, are alarming. According to the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, impaired workers are:

- 33-50 percent less productive
- Tardy three times as often
- More likely to steal from the company
- Prone to utilize 300-400 percent more medical benefits
- Likely to file five times more workers' compensation claims

Additionally, workers' compensation claims where opiates are prescribed are four times more costly than those using other means of pain relief. Indirect costs include overtime for other employees or temporary workers when employees are on leave for treatment.

The opioid crisis requires a complex series of solutions, but one of the first things an employer should do to prevent opiate use at work, and to avoid the costs associated with it, is to develop and enforce a comprehensive Drug-Free Workplace Program.

The elements of a Drug-Free Workplace Program include: policies and procedures, employee education, supervisor training, drug and alcohol testing, and employee assistance. The program should also provide notice to employees about the workplace rules,

testing procedures and consequences, and resources regarding the safe use of prescription opiates. Any Drug-Free Workplace Program should be reviewed to ensure it complies with state and federal law.

Another important reminder for employers is that the Americans with Disabilities Act requires employers to reasonably accommodate employees who are no longer abusing opiates and are currently in or have completed a treatment program, regardless of whether or not a Drug-Free Workplace Program has been implemented.

Authors
