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DRUG TESTING LABORATORY CERTIFICATION AND ACCREDITATION

In workplace, sports, and professional monitoring substance abuse testing programs, the analysis of a specimen (urine, hair, blood or saliva) in a laboratory is a key component. The analysis of the specimen to detect prohibited drugs (including illicit and pharmaceutical drugs and alcohol) must be based on forensic principles to ensure the accuracy, reliability and integrity of the test result. Thus, it is essential for programs that use substance abuse testing as a tool to determine compliance with policies, licensing standards, or rehabilitation contracts to use laboratories that are appropriately qualified in forensic toxicology. There are two national laboratory accreditation/certification programs in the area of forensic toxicology.

College of American Pathologists (CAP) Accreditation

The CAP Accreditation Program is an internationally recognized program designed to go well beyond regulatory compliance. The program is based on rigorous accreditation standards that are translated into detailed and focused checklist questions. The checklists, which provide a quality practice blueprint for laboratories to follow, are used by inspection teams as a guide to assess the overall management and operation of the laboratory.

Please note: The correct term that applies to a laboratory that has successfully completed this process is “Accredited” not “Certified”. CAP publishes a complete listing of all CAP accredited laboratories online. The list can be found under www.cap.org by clicking on the tab for "accreditation and laboratory improvement". If a laboratory does not appear on this list, it is NOT CAP Accredited.

In addition to the laboratory accreditation program, CAP offers numerous proficiency testing programs, some of which are toxicology related. The two primary urine based CAP Proficiency Testing programs are CAP-UT (Urine Toxicology which is screening only; NO confirmation testing) and CAP-FUDT (Forensic Urine Drug Testing - which includes screening and confirmation testing by GC/MS). All CAP Proficiency testing (PT) specimens are available to be purchased by any laboratory and the lab does not have to be accredited by CAP to do so. A Laboratory wishing to purchase CAP PTs is, however, issued a certification number. This certification number in no way indicates that the lab has been granted CAP Accreditation, nor does it indicate that the laboratory has applied for entry into the CAP Accreditation program.

In order to be accredited, the laboratory must successfully complete a series of PT cycles of FUDT, whose results are submitted to CAP for review, and then apply. Once the application is approved, an inspection team is assembled and will inspect the laboratory. The inspection team will go onsite at the lab and review records of the prior completed proficiency testing, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), assess instrumentation capabilities, review technical staff training, and reporting. If deficiencies are noted, the lab has 30 days to correct the deficiencies and submit the response to CAP for their approval. Once the lab has successfully met all the standards in these categories, a certificate of Accreditation is sent to the laboratory.

Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Certification

SAMHSA, an agency of the US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), is responsible for certifying drug testing laboratories that meet the standards for conducting urine drug testing authorized under federal regulations. Subpart C of the Mandatory Guidelines for Federal Workplace Drug Testing Programs, "Certification of Laboratories Engaged in Urine Drug Testing for Federal Agencies," establishes the specific certification requirements that a laboratory must meet in order to test urine specimens obtained from applicants and employees subject to federal drug testing requirements. The Guidelines specify the requirements for an applicant laboratory to become certified and for a certified laboratory to maintain its certification.

SAMHSA administers its laboratory certification program through a program called the National Laboratory Certification Program (NLCP), which includes comprehensive performance testing (PT) and laboratory inspection programs. To become certified, an applicant laboratory must successfully test 3 rounds of PT samples and successfully complete a laboratory inspection that occurs at the time the third set of PT samples are being tested by the laboratory. In addition, a newly certified laboratory must undergo an inspection 3 months after achieving certification. To maintain certification, a laboratory must participate in and satisfy the requirements for the maintenance PT program (samples sent quarterly) and achieve successful performance on every semiannual inspection. A list of SAMHSA certified laboratories is published monthly in the Federal Register.

Please Note: The SAMHSA laboratory certification program applies only to urine drug testing, and specifically to testing for marijuana, cocaine, amphetamines, opiates, and phencyclidine only. The SAMHSA NLCP program does not include evaluation or assessment of the laboratory's capabilities in testing for expanded drug panels that include barbiturates, benzodiazepines, synthetic narcotics and opioids.

As a Third Party Administrator (TPA) and Medical Review Officer (MRO) service provider to workplace, sports, and professional monitoring programs, FirstLab strongly recommends that its clients use laboratories that are SAMHSA and/or CAP-FUDT accredited/certified. While there are many clinical laboratories that perform substance abuse testing, these laboratories have not met the rigorous forensic toxicology standards necessary to ensure the legal defensibility of actions taken based on a drug test result.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT YOUR ACCOUNT MANAGER OR FIRSTLAB'S
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