

## **MEDICATION AND SAFETY CONCERN**

A question frequently submitted to FirstLab's MRO department is whether there should be a concern if an employee or applicant is taking a specific medication. There are over 700 medications listed in the Physician's Desk Reference (PDR) with warnings such as "Use caution when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery". Any medication that displays such a warning or indicates that side effects may include drowsiness, dizziness, fatigue or other similar conditions, may affect an individual's ability to safely perform certain job tasks.

For some positions such as commercial motor vehicle operators, certain medications are prohibited such as Modafinil or methadone. Amphetamines, narcotics and other habit forming drugs are also prohibited by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) for commercial drivers except under specific circumstances. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) have similar requirements to evaluate whether individuals, especially those in safety sensitive positions, are able to perform duties safely while taking medications.

In addition to the medication itself, the medical condition for which it is being used may also present a safety concern. A commercial driver on medication to treat a seizure disorder should be disqualified and those individuals on multiple medications for a heart condition may also be deemed unsafe to perform certain duties.

Companies should have a written policy in place for evaluation of individuals who are taking medications which may cause impairment. Sample policies can be found in the Federal Transit Administration's Prescription and Over the Counter Tool Kit which can be downloaded from <http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/Publications/substance/RxOcx/RxOcx.pdf>. A procedure should also be in place to evaluate employees with potentially impairing medical conditions, especially for those employees in safety sensitive positions. Some federally covered positions do have specific medical criteria defined.

Many companies rely on an opinion from the treating health care professional as to whether the individual can perform duties safely. However, the treating provider will often simply ask the employee if he/she feels capable of performing their duties and relay that as their opinion. An alternative option for the concerned employer would be to refer the individual for a fitness for duty evaluation by an independent occupational health professional.

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