



“SPECIMEN SELECTION IN RECOVERY MONITORING”

FSSolutions believes the cornerstone to effective recovery monitoring is a sound and well thought-out drug testing strategy. Strategic testing programs take advantage of all existing laboratory and pre-laboratory technologies that have appropriate scientific defensibility and combines the use of these various technologies in a fashion that is random and unpredictable by program participants.

Urine Test:

Urine testing is the forensic backbone of any testing program. There are many reasons for this. Urine has an extensive scientific base of knowledge. The testing technology is mature, accurate and reliable. Alternatively, urine has a short detection window and is relatively easy to adulterate. Urine testing is much more sensitive than hair, nail or PEth testing and will be positive when there has been much less drug or alcohol usage than is required for hair, nails or PEth to be positive. Urine specimens that are drug and alcohol positives are also very easily sent out for forensic reconfirmations to another certified laboratory.

Hair/Nail Test:

Hair and nail testing can provide a beneficial back-up to strong forensic urine-based monitoring programs, but it is not a replacement for urine programs. The detection period for head hair is about 90 days, but when hair is collected from different areas of the body, the detection period can vary widely due to different growth rates and characteristics of body hair. It takes more drug usage before drugs appear in hair, so hair testing is thought to help reveal patterns of use rather than single use.

FSSolutions recommends hair tests in cases of repeated dilute or invalid urines and should be administered randomly as a supplement to urine testing. As long detection period tests, hair and nails are not as sensitive to limited usage as is urine.

Testing of fingernails is thought to have a detection period that is approximately a month longer than scalp hair. The detection period for toenail testing is longer still by at least another month. Nail testing is a useful alternative to hair testing when the hair cannot be either collected or tested. Hair cannot be tested when the donor is bald, has alopecia or has extensively treated the hair. Fingernails also take much less time to grow to a testable amount than hair.

Forensic reconfirmation tests are more difficult when testing hair and nails. Unfortunately, there are few laboratories in the country doing expanded panel hair testing and only one that tests nails. Additionally, the amount of specimen that is needed in expanded panel testing frequently means there isn't enough specimen left to perform a reconfirmation of the initial positive at another laboratory.

It is important to note from a forensic perspective, urine testing has more peer reviewed research and case law history supporting results than hair and nail testing.

PEth Test:

PEth testing is a very specific test for significant alcohol use during the 2-4 weeks before the test. It is also recommended as a follow-up test when urine EtG/EtS testing produces indeterminate results. PEth testing is covered in other FSS Reports.

Combined Specimen Testing:

One drug test by itself does not make a diagnosis, but it can provide a helpful perspective of a participant's state of recovery. Since the easiest way to pass a drug test is not to take one, hair, nail or PEth testing are viable options when a urine specimen is reported as invalid or dilute, or the participant has missed a check-in call. Remember, the short detection window in urine testing means that whatever substance may have been present on the day of the urine test, it likely has metabolized away and would not be found if another urine is collected more than three days later. This is not the case with hair, nails and PEth. Using all available matrices gives programs a better perspective on what is really happening with a participant's recovery. It is important to remember that if a hair, nail or PEth test result is negative after a positive urine, that alternative specimen negative does not invalidate the previous positive. While it may give perspective on how much drug or alcohol ingestion there actually was, it does not invalidate the positive. Only a forensic reconfirmation test can do that.

For monitoring programs using a mix of specimens it is important to remember that the key to a successful program is randomness. The testing frequency and the choice of specimen should both be random and unpredictable, and any indeterminate results should be followed up by another test.

If you have questions or need additional clarification, please contact FSSolutions at 800-732-3784 or info@fssolutions.com