



## Drug Testing

The International Nurses Society on Addictions (IntNSA) is a specialized professional organization whose membership has expertise in the area of addictions prevention, intervention, and treatment. In keeping with both the mission statement of the IntNSA and the expertise of its members, this position paper has been developed with the hope that it will serve to educate and advise members of the nursing profession, other healthcare professionals, and members of the academic community.

Addictions, as well as alcohol and drug abuse, are serious concerns to all of society. As professional nurses specializing in the care and treatment of persons with these illnesses, we fully appreciate and share in these concerns and, because of our expertise, also recognize the limited effectiveness and usefulness of body fluid drug testing, without specific cause, in a population.

Alcoholism and other drug addictions are illnesses which can respond to appropriate treatment. As with other illnesses, early detection and intervention increase the opportunity for recovery. Random drug testing is often presented as an early detection tool. However, because of the drawbacks and limitations of drug testing, this is rarely the case. Alcoholism and other drug addictions are progressive diseases, having predictable courses with recognizable signs and symptoms. Thorough and appropriate education of peers and colleagues in the workplace in regard to these signs and symptoms as part of the employee assistance and peer assistance programs is more likely to result in early identification of persons having these illnesses than is body fluid drug testing.

Nurses are often identified as being a high-risk population and one that should be subject to mass and random testing. While the problem of chemical dependency in nurses is a serious one, causing disciplinary actions by state and regulatory bodies at a rate much greater than other problems, a higher incidence in nursing than in the general population has not been substantiated by research. Because drug testing:

- has a significant rate of error attributable, in part, to the tests, those who perform them, and the methods, or lack thereof, for the handling of samples and reports;
- is effected by numerous methods of substituting and altering samples, and these methods are easily available and frequently used;
- has been erroneously offered to the public as a resolution to the problem of drug and alcohol addiction;
- generally fails to identify the use of the drug most likely to be responsible for impaired performance, which is alcohol;
- raises numerous legal ethical issues, including violations of constitutional rights and basic human dignity;



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THEREFORE, IntNSA does not support the use of mass or random drug screens, done without probable cause, as a screening device for detection of alcohol and drug addiction or use.

FURTHERMORE, IntNSA:

1. supports the use of drug screening only when cause for concern has been established, PROVIDED the specimen is appropriately obtained and the tests performed utilizing proper quality controls and a substantiated chain of evidence;
2. believes that the results of a drug screen should be used only as one piece of information in assessing impairment, the potential for impairment, or in monitoring progress towards recovery, and that referral to an addictions treatment program should be made available prior to and, preferably, in lieu of permanent disciplinary actions being taken;
3. believes, in keeping with the current limitations of drug tests as they exist today, a positive result should always be confirmed by a second test that is known to be more accurate before it is reported.
4. supports these concepts as they apply to nurses;
5. encourages an increase in the number and effectiveness of employee assistance programs and peer assistance programs and believes these would be likely to decrease the incidence of alcohol and drug-related problems, in the workplace and among groups, which would directly result in increased safety, including the safety of patients within the healthcare system.

**Prepared by the following people on behalf of the International Nurses Society on Addictions:**

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