



### **Using Pharmacogenetic Testing to Reduce Work Comp Costs**

The complexities of the workers' compensation system challenge claims management teams to discover emerging trends in cost control and effectively implement them in their programs. One such tool available to stakeholders is pharmacogenetic testing. Using these tests in your programs will not only reduce costs on open files, but allow claims management teams to close legacy files.

#### **What is Pharmacogenetic Testing?**

Pharmacogenetic testing utilizes advances in genetic testing and a deeper scientific understanding of how an individual's unique metabolic pathway impacts a response to a certain prescription drug, or combination of prescription drugs and/or compounds. It also exposes potential allergic reactions one could have based on their genetic make-up.

Testing of this nature has moved beyond its infancy over the last several years based on continued scientific research into the human genome. The continued research into this field has resulted in reduced costs to the initial testing and more reliable interpretations to provide medical professionals with the information they require to reduce the amount, and/or frequency of prescription medications used in the treatment of a condition(s).

#### **Ready, Set, Go!**

There are currently a number of clinics and labs able to perform pharmacogenetic testing. This includes mail order options, where a testing kit is sent to the individual and returned without the person being required to leave their home. The testing kit centers around a non-invasive buccal (q-tip) swab that is inserted into the person's mouth. Genetic material from the inside of one's mouth serves as the basis for collecting the necessary sample. The swab is then sent to a specialized lab for testing and analysis. Results from the test are usually available within 48 hours.

The report issued following the testing includes:

- Drug interactions: Potential allergic and other adverse reactions and drug effectiveness; and
- Other interactions: Drug to food interactions, drug to alcohol interactions and drug to lab interactions.

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### **Impact on Workers' Compensation Costs**

Pharmacogenetic testing presents important cost saving opportunities for interested stakeholders. This includes the following:

- Improved prescription drug regimens and pain management programs. This reduces the number of unnecessary prescription medications one may use when recovering from an injury and other unnecessary medical care and treatment;
- Targeted medical care and treatment, included treatment plans. This reduces the number of times an injured worker needs to see a doctor;
- Reduced number of clinic visits for titrate medications or the selection of new medications; and
- Improved effectiveness of prescription drugs used by an injured employee. Most importantly, this reduces the chance someone recovering from an injury will have an adverse drug interaction.

Using pharmacogenetic testing may not be appropriate in every workers' compensation case. It can reduce program costs in cases where the employee meets the following criteria:

- Employees taking a number of different prescription medications for several injuries. This includes instances where there is a physical and psychological and/or psychiatric component;
- Employees with a significant history of prolonged prescription drug use. In other instances, it can be effective for claims involving use of costly prescription drug where the employee reports little or no effect; and
- Employees who are Medicare beneficiaries (or will become a beneficiary in the foreseeable future) where parties may consider using a Medicare Set-aside. Reducing the use of prescription drugs prior to the preparation of a Medicare Set-aside allocation can reduce costs significantly.

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## **Conclusions**

Advances in science have provided members of the claims management team with an easy to use and effective tool to evaluate the success of various treatment options. Using pharmacogenetic testing is a tool interested stakeholders can use when managing workers' compensation claims. It can also provide better treatment options for injured employees and also reduce future costs.

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