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Major Occupational Health Groups Publish Guidance for Employers on the Impact of Marijuana in the Workplace

Paper by AAOHN and ACOEM examines trends in marijuana consumption, workplace policies regarding its use and legal implications for employers

(April 14, 2015) The American Association of Occupational Health Nurses (AAOHN) and the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) have published guidance for employers aimed at helping them better understand the implications of marijuana use on the workforce as attitudes toward marijuana and laws restricting it continue to change.

The guidance paper, jointly published this month in ACOEM's *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* (JOEM) and AAOHN's journal *Workplace Health & Safety*, summarizes current evidence regarding marijuana consumption; discusses possible side effects, including temporary impairment as it relates to the workplace; reviews existing federal and state laws that impact employers; and suggests various strategies available for monitoring marijuana use among employees.

"Marijuana is the most frequently used illicit drug of abuse in the United States and around the world," said ACOEM President Kathryn Mueller, MD. "At the same time, it is, by a wide margin, the drug most often detected in workplace drug testing programs. With rapidly changing attitudes and laws regarding marijuana use, employers need to examine their current policies and be prepared for potential impacts on workforce as these trends continue."

"As two organizations committed to the health and safety of workers, it makes sense for us to address the potential consequences of workforce marijuana use on employers, ranging from the risk and associated cost of adverse events to the possible loss of productivity," said AAOHN President Jeannie Tomlinson. "This guidance offers practical steps that any employer can take to ensure their impairment and drug-testing policies are effective and that jobs are being performed safely."

Lead author Jennan A. Phillips, PhD, MSN, RN, and colleagues from AAOHN and ACOEM conducted a comprehensive literature search of currently available scientific evidence regarding effects of marijuana use on workers, as well as a broad examination of the legal implications of rapidly evolving marijuana

legislation and policies – both at the state and federal level. The researchers also examined medical implications of marijuana use for the workforce, including the risk of injury due to impairment – which may occur as legalized and more widely available marijuana-containing products are increasingly used by workers.

The guidance includes detailed examination of current workplace drug-testing trends and best practices. The authors conclude by offering eight recommendations for employers, ranging from suggestions for effective drug-testing and employee-education programs to policies regarding off-work use of marijuana.

“The safety of workers and the public must be central to all workplace policies and employers must clearly articulate that legalization of marijuana for recreational or medical use does not negate workplace policies for safe job performance,” the guidance states. “The evolving legal situation on medical and recreational marijuana requires employers to consult with legal experts to craft company policy and clarify implications of impaired on-duty workers. This changing environment surrounding marijuana use requires close collaboration between employers, occupational health professionals, and legal experts to ensure workplace safety is not compromised.”

The full-text guidance document is available at

http://journals.lww.com/joem/Fulltext/2015/04000/Marijuana_in_the_Workplace_Guidance_for.17.aspx (JOEM) and <http://whs.sagepub.com/content/early/2015/04/10/2165079915581983.full> (WH&S).

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About AAOHN — The American Association of Occupational Health Nurses (AAOHN) is a 5,000 member professional association dedicated to advancing the health, safety, and productivity of domestic and global workforces by providing education, research, public policy, and practice resources for occupational and environmental health nurses throughout the United States and the world. These professionals are the largest group of health care providers serving the worksite. AAOHN is comprised of 120 chapter organizations that are incorporated agencies under their state regulations. For more information, visit www.aohn.org.

About ACOEM — The American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) represents nearly 4,500 physicians specializing in occupational and environmental medicine. Founded in 1916, ACOEM is the largest medical society in the United States dedicated to promoting the health of workers through preventive medicine, clinical care, disability management, research, and education. For more information, visit www.acoem.org.