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Urine and drug screening proposed for chronic pain patients

Routine or random urine and drug screening of chronic pain patients may allow pain medicine specialists to provide better pain management, and prevent harm to the patient and community from prescription drug abuse.

Adelaide pain medicine specialist, Dr Penny Briscoe, will discuss the risks and benefits of more intense screening of medication usage at the Faculty of Pain Medicine's (FPM) spring meeting in Queensland today.

Dr Briscoe, a former FPM dean, says pain medicine specialists need to balance providing appropriate pain management, which includes prescribing opioids, to the 20 per cent of Australians and New Zealanders who suffer chronic pain, with preventing harm to the patient and the community.

"Medical practitioners and the public are becoming concerned about the explosive increase in the use of opioids for the management of chronic pain and, associated with this, the increase of abuse, misuse and diversion of prescription opioids," Dr Briscoe says.

In the United States, where monitoring of all patients on opioids is recommended, up to 20 per cent of patients have urine and drug screens that do not match the medication they are reportedly taking.

Dr Briscoe says there is also increasing evidence in the United States and Australia of "Fossil Pharming", where the elderly sell their opioids to supplement their pension.

"I think we should be screening a lot more patients than we are," she says.

Dr Briscoe says routine testing, or random testing, of patients should be seen as part of a holistic management plan, and not a punitive measure.

"Not all drugs work in everybody so it's important to see how the patient is absorbing the drug," she says. "It helps open up the conversation with patients and reveals whether they are adhering to their treatment program, which helps a practitioner to better manage their pain."

At the same time, Dr Briscoe warns there are shortfalls of urine screening, including false positives recorded for drugs not taken.

- **For more information or to request interviews, please contact ANZCA Media Manager Meaghan Shaw on +61 3 8517 5303, +61 408 259 369 or mshaw@anzca.edu.au. Follow us on Twitter [@ANZCA](https://twitter.com/ANZCA).**