

# The Question of Quantitative Levels

The quantitative ('quant') level of a positive drug screen specifically indicates whether a drug or a drug indicator was detected in the donor's system at the time of collection.

## **A drug can be detected in a donor's sample and still be reported as negative.**

A laboratory has what is called, "cutoff levels". These levels are designed to screen out some over-the-counter pharmaceuticals or vitamins, certain foods that may show as drug indicators, as well as ambient absorption, such as walking past a smoke-filled room.

**Many factors influence the level of a drug in a donor's system.** Metabolism, physical condition, fluid balance, frequency of drug ingestion and the last time the drug was consumed are all contributing factors to quantitative levels. The 'number' you may see does *not* provide valid information outside the entire review process conducted by a licensed Medical Review Officer.

## **The Department of Transportation (DOT) 49 CFR Part 40.163(f) says the MRO cannot provide quantitative levels to Employer or other drug screening company.**

"You must not provide quantitative values to the DER or C/TPA for drug or validity test results. However, you must provide the test information in your possession to a SAP... [Substance Abuse Professional]...who consults with you (see Sec. 40.293(g))."

## **Why does the DOT discourage quantitative level reporting and what does that have to do with Non DOT drug screening?**

- A. The 'numbers' associated with quant levels require interpretation and context. This process should be handled by a medical doctor.
- B. There can be liability issues with the pre-judgment that may occur if a quant level is available.
- C. The DOT is the single standard for drug screening. A regulation within this standard is always a consideration for non DOT drug screening. A non DOT quant level has the same repercussions a DOT quant level has – misinterpretation and liability.

While it may seem that providing quant levels for a drug screen is a good idea, the opposite is true. Providing *unambiguous and comprehensible* information is helpful to our clients; providing confusing or potentially misinterpreted information is not so helpful. As a DER or C/TPA, we must consider the ramifications of the information we provide: for ourselves, a client, and for a donor (or an employee). Quantitative levels are just a *part* of the medical professional's resources for interpreting a drug screening result. In a medical or SAP context, these levels assist with the overall interpretation of a positive drug screen. Outside of that context, quantitative levels provoke far more misinterpretation than they provide any meaningful information.

