

**Reasons and Resources:
An EAP Practice Based Research Model**

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I. The Model and Its History

The Mount Sinai Medical Center's EAP has developed a practice based research model to complement its package of core organizational and employee services. The model represents an expanded role for EAP practice within the context of an academic health care center. Practice based research integrates the provision of core EAP services with established methods of scientific inquiry. Significantly, the research component is driven by issues and concerns emerging from the provision of EAP services (Epstein 95). These issues and concerns are articulated by EAP practitioners who participate in the design and implementation of the research. Consequently, the emphasis remains on practice which determines the direction of all research activities. The model has the potential to enhance programmatic legitimacy while increasing funding. Ideally, the model will in the words of Paul Roman "contribute to the accumulation of a body of scientific knowledge bearing upon employee assistance work" (1992:vii).

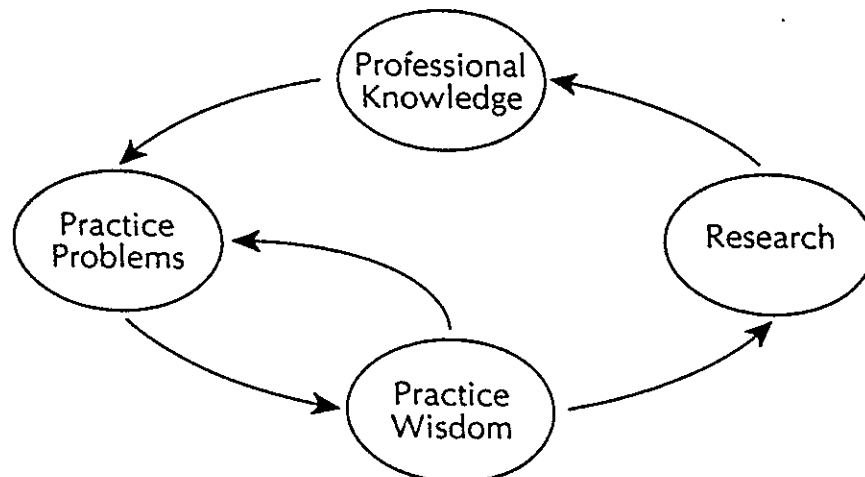
Initially, Mount Sinai's practice based research model evolved out of a need to computerize the program's information system. Prior to 1991 the EAP relied on a manual system of record keeping. Accordingly, the program was hard pressed to respond to organizational requests for data concerning programmatic utilization and client outcomes. Fortuitously, the program manager and Dr. Irwin Epstein (Mount Sinai Research and Evaluation Consultant) met with Bruce Brock Ph.D. (President, Information Transfer Systems) and Andrea Foote Ph.D. (Distinguished Research Scientist, University of Michigan) to explore the utility of an EAP software package developed in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The Ann Arbor group also included Jack Erfurt and Max Heirich. Interestingly, Erfurt, Foote and Heirich were all established researchers who had contributed to the EAP field. As a result of subsequent exploratory discussions, a collaborative relationship emerged and the EAP agreed to field test the software at Mount Sinai. Using resources from a foundation grant the EAP was able to purchase hardware and obtain technical assistance in the area of research and evaluation. By the end of 1991, the new case management system (CMS) was up and ready for data entry (currently, we have approximately 1000 cases in the system). Moreover, the basis for broader research partnerships was also established with the University of Michigan group.

In the following months, a series of meetings occurred in which we shared our CMS experiences with the software developers. Perhaps more importantly, joint research projects were explored and a working relationship was formed with the University of Michigan's Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations. At this point, the concept of research partnerships between established academic research centers and our EAP evolved as a complement to previously developed internal research and evaluation resources. The potential of mutually beneficial collaborative efforts was presented to the medical center's administration and was embraced as being consistent with the broader objectives of a progressive Human Resource Department located in an academic health

care institution. In 1992, we began to prepare a proposal to test the efficacy of wellness technology as a vehicle for EAP sponsored primary prevention efforts. The program manager was invited to Washington D.C. by the National Institute of Alcohol and Alcohol Abuse for training in the preparation of R-01 research proposals submitted to the National Institute of Health. This project marked a critical turning in point in the history of Mount Sinai's EAP and demonstrated the dynamic potential of research partnerships.

The decision to pursue research activities generated an internal dialogue concerning the substantive implications of EAP sponsored research. Issues such as confidentiality, research ethics, methodology, design and program orientation were vigorously discussed. As a result, Mount Sinai's practice based research model evolved. The paradigm stresses the importance of practitioner participation with an emphasis on core EAP services. Scientific procedures and methods are employed to illuminate the nature of EAP practices. Below is a graphic illustration of the model (Ferns and Reidel 1995).

Cyclical Model for Practice Based Research



II. Practice Based Research Projects.

Presently the Mount Sinai Medical Center's Employee Assistance Program is involved with three practice based research projects. These include: **a)** a partnership with Boston University Center on Work and Family comparing EAP assessment and intervention techniques, **b)** a project to provide long term counseling (LTC) services to high risk clients, and **c)** a community/workplace alliance for the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse. These projects are all funded and reflect the current state of our practice based research capabilities.

The Boston University project is an excellent example of the practical utility of research partnerships. Specifically, the resources of an established university based research center were matched by the time, energy and practice expertise of a diverse group of EAP professionals. The study's objective is to compare and contrast two distinct styles of EAP assessment and intervention, namely, confrontational and motivational counseling (Johnson 1986; Yablonsky 1989; Miller and Rollnick 1991; Procheska and Di Clemente 1992) . The project was developed and designed by Boston University's research team. Practitioner input has been encouraged while efforts have been made to minimize the operational demands on participating EA programs. Data collection is in progress and the results should make a significant contribution to the profession's knowledge base. In this way the respective resources of both practitioners and researchers combine to advance the field. Research partnerships provide excellent cost effective opportunities for EA practitioners to explore practice based research activities. In this case Boston University provided technical assistance, project materials and training services to all participating EA programs. The costs of the project were funded by the National Institute of Alcohol and Alcohol Abuse (NIAAA) thus providing an external source of resources to all program participants.

The Long Term Counseling (LTC) project is based on previous research which demonstrated that ongoing supportive counseling services, provided to alcohol impaired EAP clients, reduced relapse rates and improved outcomes (Erfurt and Foote 1988, 1991, 1992; Foote, Googins et.al. 1993). The project's objective is to explore the impact of long term counseling services offered to a expanded pool of high risk EAP clients. Secondly, the project will seek to develop a screening instrument to accurately identify "high risk" clients upon EAP intake. The project will build upon instrumentation developed as part of the ALMACA sponsored Client Assessment Form (Cook 1988). The LTC project has been funded by a private foundation and has provided the program with an additional two year counseling position. The entire counseling staff will be involved with the project and we expect to begin counseling interventions in January of 1996.

Finally, in an effort to create a family focused substance abuse prevention program, Mount Sinai's EAP has developed the Community Education and Life Skills Enhancement Kit (CELSEK), entitled "Work and Family in East Harlem." The project integrates two themes discussed in the prevention literature, namely, workplace/community alliance building and family strengthening interventions (Bernard 1988; Kumpfer 1988). The project is based on a modified version of community education technology developed by the Museum of the City of New York. This technology is based on the presentation of photographic imagery to generate thematically focused discussion and follow-up experiences. Specifically, CELSEK's goal is to present photographic images reflecting positive aspects of work and family life in the East Harlem community. These images are presented to various groups in an effort to generate dialogue and activities that strengthen family relationships and enhance marketable work skills. It is hypothesized that individuals with strong family relationships and marketable work skills will have lower risk

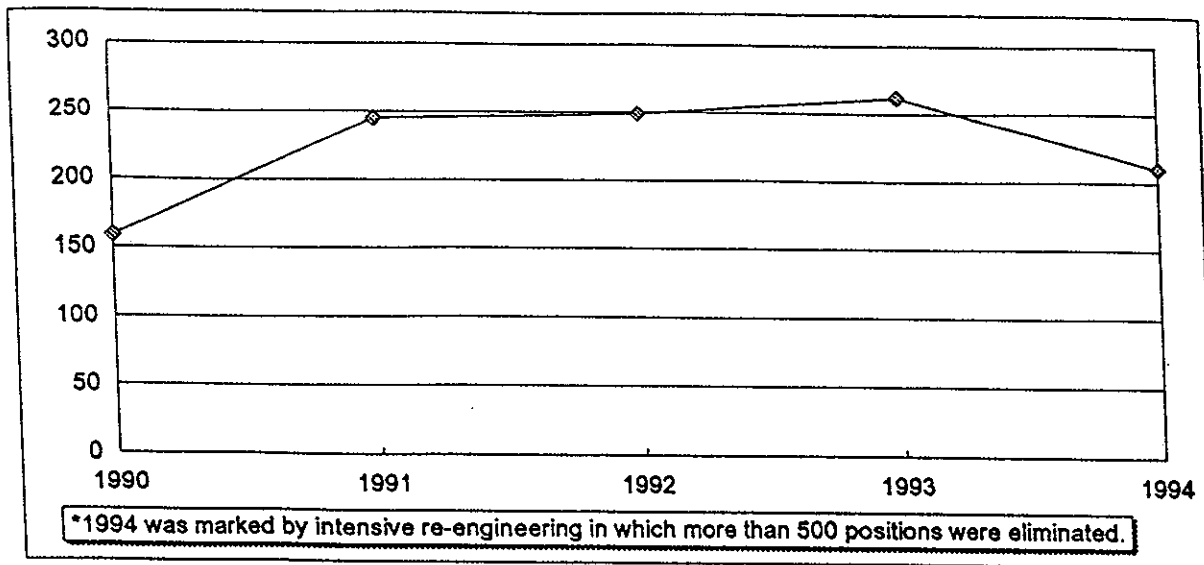
levels for a range of problems including drug and alcohol abuse. To our knowledge, the CELSEK project marks the first time that an internal employee assistance program has collaborated with a cultural institution and a community advisory committee to develop a primary prevention program. Presently, pilot field tests are being conducted and the program is seeking funding for a rigorously designed multi-site field test.

III. The Significance of EAP Practice Based Research.

The importance of practice based research needs to be understood within the context of contemporary EA practice. The work place is experiencing rapid and profound change. Economic restructuring, the globalization of labor, downsizing and the impact of new technologies are reshaping the world of work (Craypo and Nissen, 1993; Applebaum and Batt, 1994). Employees are experiencing growing amounts of stress and pressure in the restructured workplace. These pressures also affect EA professionals as both employees and providers of service. Accordingly, practice based research has the potential to make several important contributions to the field. For example, practice based research can enable EA professionals to reflect upon puzzling, troubling or interesting situations rooted in their EA practice. Reflective practice plays a critical role in the development of professional competence and knowledge (Schon, 1983, 1995). Skills and knowledge-building legitimate the profession and can justify EA work in the increasingly competitive world of work. Moreover, practice based researchers are multi-skilled by definition, thus, becoming more competitive in the new workplace. Interestingly, the process of acquiring basic computer and research skills is consistent with the increased expectations being placed on many employees. Consequently, the practice based model can provide EA professionals an opportunity to use their own skill building experiences to counsel employees who are struggling with the process. Finally, EA practice based research is a potentially fundable activity. Research projects can generate both internal and external resources to support a range of programmatic activities. Similarly, research partnerships frequently result in creative "spin offs" which can lead to new areas of program development. To summarize, practice based research can legitimate EA work, increase programmatic efficacy and generate resources.

Data from Mount Sinai's EA information system can demonstrate the potential importance of the practice based research model. Mount Sinai is a large academic health care institution which is in the process of restructuring. As is frequently the case, restructuring has become synonymous with downsizing. Accordingly, there have been several waves of layoffs during 1994. It is suspected that the impact of these organizational contractions have effected EAP utilization and problem presentations. Illustratively, the below graph reflects a statistically significant 19.8% reduction in case registrations during 1994.

Case Registration Graph



Informal discussions with other EAP professionals reveal similar trends within downsizing organizations. This suggests the possibility that re-engineering suppresses program utilization. Similarly, the aggregate number of drug and alcohol presentations dropped by more than fifty percent during 1994. However, the total number of clients assessed to have alcohol and drug problems during the two comparison years remained roughly unchanged.

Alcohol and Other Drugs Problem Presentations

	Primary Problem	Secondary Problem	Total
1993	25	11	36
1994	12	19	31

Note: Primary = Presented Problem; Secondary = Assessed Problem

A review of EAP training services reveals that slightly more managers, supervisors, union representatives and employees attended EAP sponsored training and orientation activities during 1994 (> 1.6%, N=968). Hence, EA training activities do not appear to account for the observed changes in case registrations and problem presentations. These changes have occurred during a time when many supervisors and employees appear to be under increased stress in the workplace. This suggests that some potential clients are reluctant to utilize EAP services, particularly for problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, during

periods of organizational downsizing. This trend has been referred to as a "paradoxical utilization effect" reflecting decreased program utilization during a period of increased employee stress (Hughes, 1995). Clearly, the impact of economic restructuring on the EA profession is of critical importance to the field and an appropriate topic for future practice based research projects.

IV. Conclusion.

The contemporary workplace presents the Employee Assistance Profession many challenges. As the economic restructuring proceeds, EAPs are being asked to develop new programs to meet the needs of diverse organizations and employee populations. The implications of re-engineering, downsizing, multi-skilling and technological innovation, in a diverse workplace, are profound. The EA profession must adapt as the nature and conditions of work change.

Accordingly, the staff of Mount Sinai's EAP has been asked to develop additional skills while adopting a new model of practice. Clearly, this is a difficult task, but well worth the investment. It has served to strengthen the program while assisting the staff to adapt to the sweeping changes transforming the workplace. Fundamentally, Mount Sinai's EAP remains a program based on the provision of core services to the organization and its employees. However, the development of our practice based research model illuminates the process while providing reasons and resources to sustain the effort.

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