

Employee Assistance

SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS

DECEMBER/JANUARY 1995/1996

VOL. 8, NO. 3



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EmployeeAssistance

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FEATURES

- How Can EA Programs Use Self-Care?**5
Programs, employee guides maximize proactive EA approach.
by **Cindy L. Kreig**
- Locks and Keys**8
IS security mechanisms need foundation of protection principles.
by **Dennis Steinauer and Carole K. McMichael, MA**
- Examining EAP Innovations**14
Regional networks, alliances consolidate services, redefine EAP.
by **Daniel Berman, PysD, MHA, and Susan B. Randers, PhD**
- Reaching Through the Pain**16
Variety of employee grieving experiences challenges EA skills.
by **Gina Spielman, MSW**



Locks and Keys

Page 8

COLUMNS AND DEPARTMENTS



Examining EAP Innovations

Page 14

- Washington OnLine: Slash and Burn**12
by **Richard Bickerton**
- Commentary**4
- Product Literature**21
- Classifieds**22
- Resources**25
- Advertising Index**26

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Aging, Growth and Renewal

There must be something about the aging process that changes our perception. It used to be that my life was always focused on things to come—the first (and last) day of school, my birthday, Thanksgiving, Christmas. You name it, I was probably waiting for it.

As I sit down to write now, my focus seems to have shifted more to what has happened. This year is no exception—my wife and I celebrated 25 years of marriage, a job promotion, a new addition to the EA staff and more. There's been some settling in the EA field too. But mostly, I look back over the value of the people in this field.

Those of you at Boston's EAPA last year may have noticed what some called "unsettling." People lost their long-time EA jobs; the EAPA membership and EA Certification Commission had several issues to resolve. The direction of the healthcare field, although still involved in massive reconfiguration, had several question marks regarding employee assistance programs.

This year in Seattle, the EAPA conference struck me somewhat differently. Most people reported working harder than ever. Some members flew into the conference late because of business commitments, while others left early because of them. The EA Certification Commission had few members attend their meeting, a sign perhaps that the controversy of last year has subsided for now. Also, EAPA posted an annual statement indicating fiscal responsibility has paid off...literally. For the 2200 attendees and 80-plus exhibitors, the conference became an oasis—a place to slow down, take sustenance from each other, reconnect and move on. It helped to put a face with a voice.

Several times over the past years, I have had the pleasure of introducing new EA staff to EAPA show attendees. Staff members' reactions have always been the same: "These are the nicest people. I've worked in other sales areas, but the people I've spoken with here are by far the friendliest, and they care." Emily German is our new Eastern Sales Manager. This was her first EAPA conference, and it wasn't three hours and she had shown the picture of her new son Tyler to everyone at dinner. She'll fit right in.

One of the most rewarding events at the conference for EA is the meeting with our Editorial Advisory Board. I wish I had had a tape recorder going to capture the insights, forthrightness and integrity among our board. Once again, this year, with their input, the editorial focus of the magazine will shift somewhat, beginning with this issue.

As the EA field has changed, our focus has expanded. Each issue of the magazine will provide readers with an employee assistance focus, designed for those who provide or manage this service. In addition, there will be a clinical/training focus, designed to address current diagnostic and assessment areas in and out of the workplace. One new focal point, the corporate health focus, is designed to pinpoint service delivery issues for purchasers of EA. Finally, an information systems/outcomes measurement category helps professionals keep up with field technology and develop accountability/statistical measures to highlight EA's position as the premier provider of workplace BH service.

The trade show schedule and literature showcases, including the new publishers showcases, allow EA to cover a broad spectrum of services and products that reflect how much the advertisers take your needs into consideration and grow with you.

A healthful and happy New Year to you all!

Chip Drotos

Employee Assistance

SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS

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HOW CAN EA PROGRAMS USE
Self-Care?

For George, stress is not an occasional condition; it is a way of life. Layoffs at work mean an increased workload, which means extra hours on the job. This is not helping his home life either. His teenage son is skipping school on a regular basis, and his wife, who also works full-time, is having to deal with both the school and her son on her own. Arguments at the dinner table, when they do all sit down together, are par for the course. And to make matters worse, when George woke up this morning his neck was so stiff that he could hardly turn his head.

In short, George is a mess. Now there are a couple of directions that George can go. Naturally, as an employee assistance professional, you see that the most logical step is for George to call his wellness professional. But he doesn't because he feels that everyone at work is stressed these days; kids will be kids; a stiff neck is just one of the potholes on the road called middle age; and he is just too darn busy. So George does nothing and becomes a walking bomb, something your program is trying hard to avoid.

So what can EA professionals do for individuals like George? Some organizations are looking at whether self-care and medical consumer education, which are gaining increasing popularity and acceptance among managed care organizations and employers, can help EAPs be more effective.

By Cindy L. Krieg



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SELF-CARE

Self-Care is what individuals do for themselves to recognize, prevent and treat specific health problems. And the need for self-care education is universal. It is based on the straight forward and practical philosophy that "everyone can get sick." Studies in the United States and Europe show that the average family faces over 50 common health problems per year, and of these, 80 to 90 percent are cared for at home without any intervention from a health professional. Most importantly, self-care education works. It helps employees:

- Become more confident in handling minor health problems.
- Determine when they should see a health professional.
- Work in partnership with their health professionals.

Self-care programs have one of the highest participation and satisfaction ratings of all health education programs. Studies show participation rates of 80 percent and higher on a regular basis. Ninety-five percent of employees who participate in self-care programs give them ratings of "very good" to "excellent." Even more important, people use their self-care guides. Of those surveyed, 75 percent consulted their self-care guide within the first six months, following the start of the program.

These statistics have not gone unnoticed by managed care organizations and large employer groups. Kaiser Permanente in California is so supportive of self-care and its acceptance by its members that it provides a self-care guide to every member. Last year JCPenny sent a self-care guide to older adults to its entire retiree population. Their goal was to have a resource at home that they could turn to before they called their doctor. In early 1996, DuPont will be distributing a customized self-care guide to employees and retirees that reside in the continental United States. Their self-care program is just one of the wellness components.

But will self-care really help an employee assistance program be more effective? And how can these two programs be brought together in a "win-win" situation for both employees and employers?

Self-Care Goals

The number one goal of self-care is to improve the quality of care provided in the home. The first step is to provide a user-friendly self-care guide. As employees learn how easy it is to reference a guide and make decisions about their care, they become more confident and competent in their role as healthcare providers. (Fifty-nine percent of participants said that their self-care program helped improve the quality of the care they provided at home.) And most importantly, a self-care guide will help them become aware of when to call a healthcare professional. (Fifty-nine percent consulted their healthcare guide before contacting their doctor versus 12 percent prior to the self-care program.)

This is where the first connection between a self-care program and an EAP can happen. There are a multitude of health problems that are a direct result of a detrimental lifestyle. Self-care guides make employees aware of this in a non-threatening, educational way.

Using George as an example, if he were to look up neck pain in his self-care guide, he would learn that the pain can be caused by stress and tension. George would become aware that his physical pain may be directly related to the problems he is experiencing at home. The self-care guide will also help George decide on home treatment options and learn what symptoms indicate a need to call his health professional.

The connection between a self-care program and an employee assistance program can be reinforced with information on an organization's EAP (telephone numbers and other organizational messages) in the self-care guide. DuPont used this approach with their self-care program. "DuPont feels that incorporating information about its EAP is an important way to demonstrate that self-care is an integral part of our prevention and wellness programs," says Robert Bertara, of DuPont's HR.