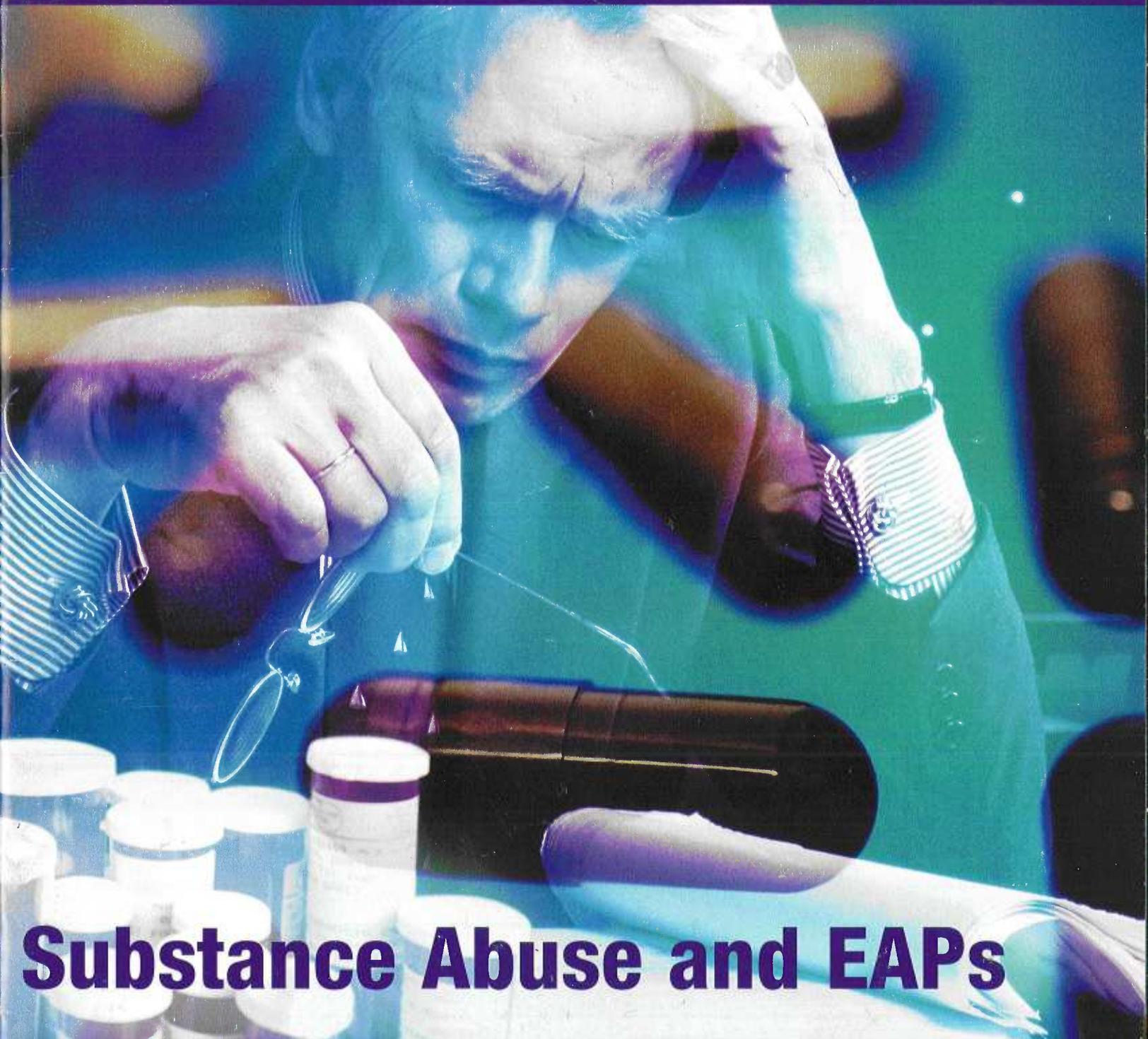


Journal of **Employee Assistance**

The magazine of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association

VOL. 35 NO. 3 • 3RD QUARTER 2005



Substance Abuse and EAPs

Also Inside:
An Integrated Approach to Presenteeism
Gender Discrimination in Employee Assistance?
Research Report: Peer Support and Substance Abuse



Employee Assistance
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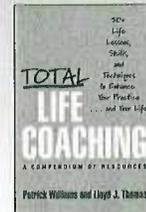
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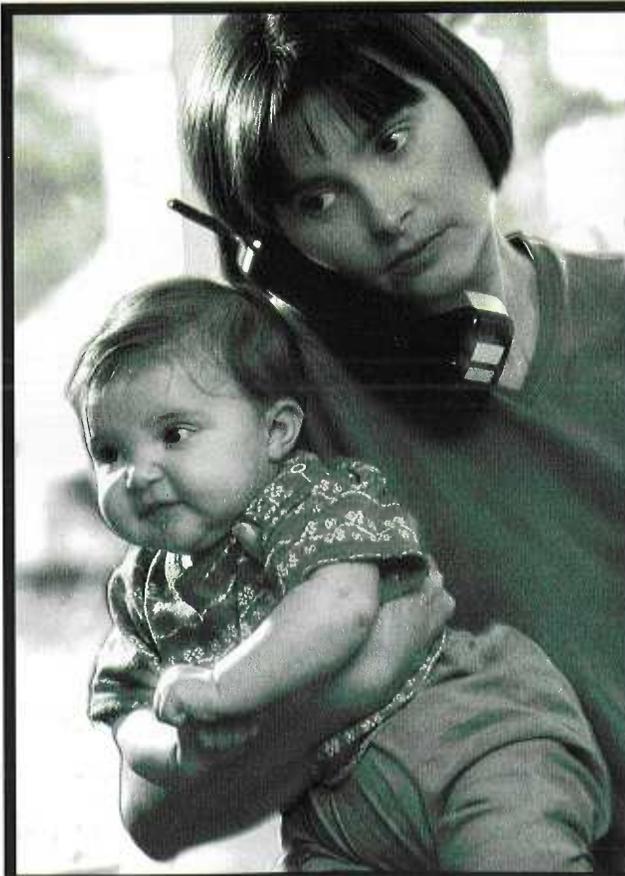
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Evaluation of a Peer Support Program to Reduce Substance Abuse Within a Large Manufacturing Company

Jeffrey N. Thompson, M.D., M.P.H., Kelly B. Kyes, Ph.D., Allen D. Cheadle, Ph.D., Charles H. Bombardier, Ph.D., Robert Jacobsen, Karen Sorenson, Paula Stewart, and Steve Hill

Analyses of drug-testing results, benefits utilization patterns, and other variables failed to show statistically significant advantages to implementing peer support programs, but given their low cost, they merit further study.

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Our Foundation and Our Opportunity

by Maria Hartley, LEAP

Any discussion of the employee assistance industry and its impact on the workplace must begin with substance abuse, particularly alcohol addiction. The development and proliferation of EAPs coincided with employers' growing interest in reducing the impact of alcohol abuse on workers' productivity and performance. Identifying employees with alcohol problems and providing them with appropriate assessment and referral services became the foundation upon which EA professionals built today's broad-brush programs that address issues ranging from depression and stress to financial and legal problems to child and elder care.

All too often, however, the discussion about employee assistance neglects to mention the important role substance abuse plays today and will continue to play in our future. As the theme articles in this issue of the *Journal* make clear, combating substance abuse offers an opportunity—make that several opportunities—to enhance our skill sets, leverage new markets, and position ourselves as workplace experts on behavioral issues that affect the bottom line.

Such opportunities reflect evolving attitudes and policies toward substance abuse and especially alcohol abuse. Although employers' initial interest in addressing substance abuse stemmed from workers' drinking behaviors and their impact on workplace performance, alcohol eventually began to seem benign in comparison to more addictive (and illegal) substances, including cocaine, heroin, and marijuana. The grounding of the *Exxon Valdez* in Alaska's Prince William Sound in 1989 returned alcohol to the spotlight and prompted the passage of federal legislation in 1991 man-

dating drug testing for transportation employees in safety-sensitive positions. That law, and the recent enactment of various state and local bans on cigarette smoking in commercial establishments, suggests that the use of alcohol, nicotine, and other addictive substances is now seen as a public safety issue rather than simply a workplace performance matter.

This shift in perception has created new opportunities for EAP providers to utilize their unique knowledge of substance abuse issues to the benefit of both employers and employees. As the articles beginning on page 20 explain, EA professionals can provide substance abuse professional (SAP) services to help work organizations meet the demands of the Department of Transportation drug-testing requirements. They also can work with impaired professional programs (IPPs) to ensure that doctors, lawyers, and others subject to disciplinary action by state licensing boards receive proper treatment, thereby minimizing the risks to patients and clients (not to mention employers). They can encourage employees to adopt wellness-oriented lifestyles to decrease the possibility of relapse, and they can help employers alter workplace cultures that tolerate and even encourage substance abuse.

Excited as I am about these articles, I am equally if not more pleased that this issue contains a Research Report, our first in more than a year. The report discusses the experience of a large employer in implementing peer assistance programs at several sites. I encourage you to read the report and let me or any other member of the Communication Advisory Subcommittee know whether you find it helpful.

Finally, be sure to read the feature

articles on how women are faring in the EA industry and how EA professionals can partner with disability management specialists to reduce the incidence of presenteeism. And don't miss John Maynard's "View from Here" column on being proactive in identifying new opportunities to prove our value to the workplace. John expands the definition of substance abuse to include abuse of food, which can lead to obesity and then to a host of other problems that impede workplace productivity.

I hope this issue of the *Journal* spurs all of us to take a fresh look at substance abuse and consider the role it plays in our businesses. Let's build on our knowledge of abuse and addiction and make the most of new opportunities awaiting us. ■



Maria Hartley

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