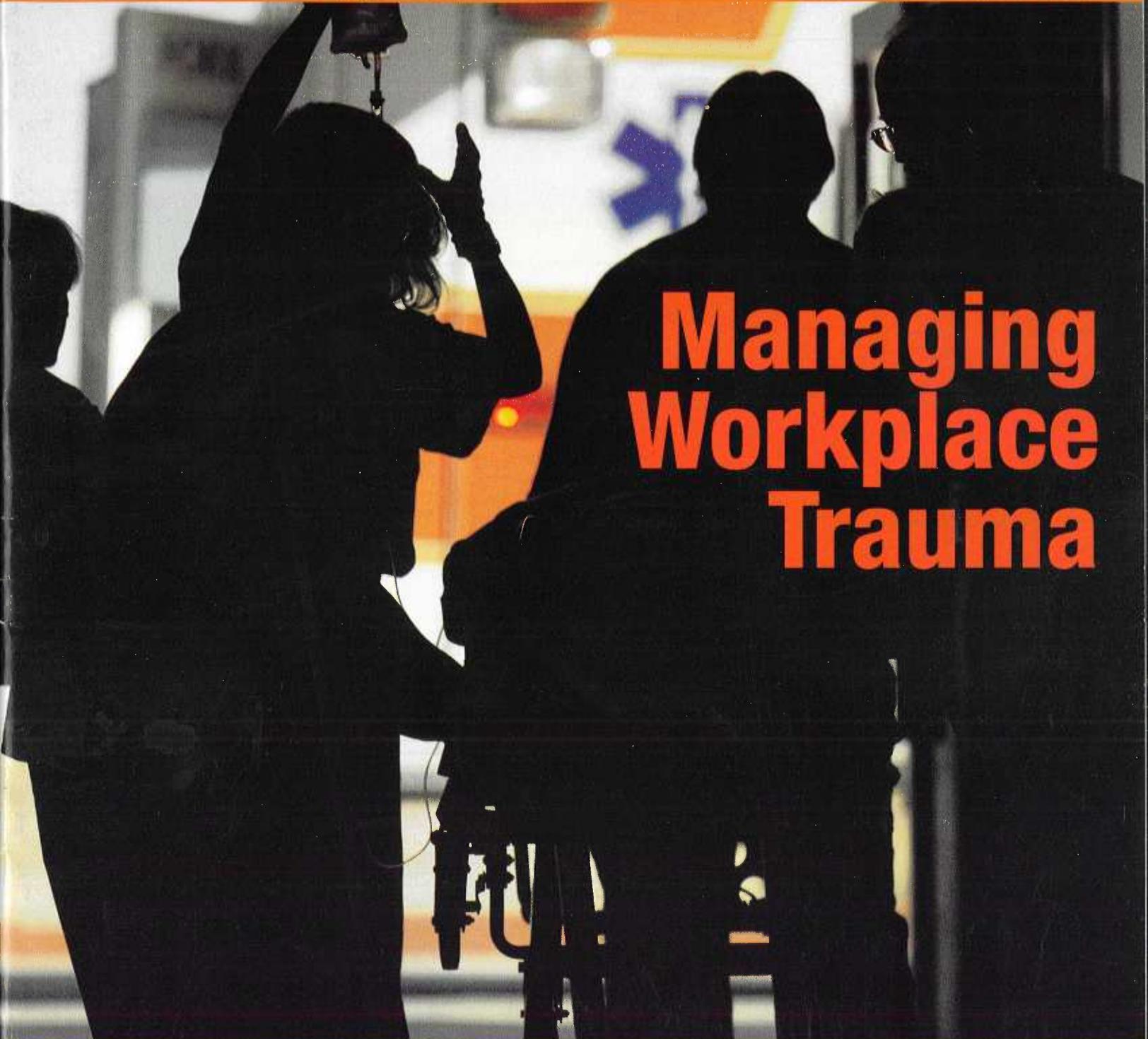


Journal of **Employee Assistance**

The magazine of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association

VOL. 36 NO. 2 • 2ND QUARTER 2006

A photograph showing the silhouettes of several people in a clinical or office setting. One person in the foreground is adjusting a piece of equipment, possibly a scale or a specialized chair. In the background, there is a person in a wheelchair and another person standing. The scene is dimly lit, with a bright light source creating a glow in the background.

Managing Workplace Trauma

Also Inside:
Supporting Pregnant Women and New Parents in the Workplace
Helping Implement Non-Smoking and Non-Smoker Policies



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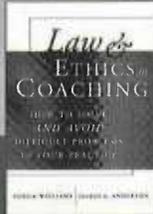
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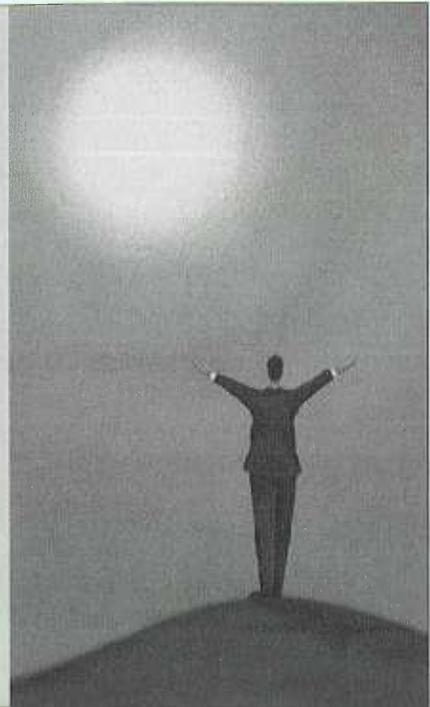
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Increasing retention rates among new mothers requires more than just meeting minimal leave requirements and establishing onsite breastfeeding facilities, as the experience of an Australian banking firm makes clear.

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As more employers take aggressive steps to reduce health care costs arising from employees' tobacco use, EAPs can and must help ensure the process goes smoothly and meets the needs of all parties involved.

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"In earlier days, the way to deal with trauma in Australia was to go to the pub and have a beer with your mates."

Robin Smith
"Australia: Rethinking the
Strict CISM Model"

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An Untapped Market

In regard to Fred Holloway's article, "Selling EAPs to Small Businesses," which appeared in the 1st quarter 2006 issue, I have been selling EAPs to companies since 1975 and have always advocated that small businesses are an untapped market for EAPs. The sad part, when I started 32 years ago, is that a good deal of the EAP literature said EAPs wouldn't work in a company with fewer than 1,000 employees. That kept many small businesses from even trying to set up their own EAP.

There are some precautions to conducting EAP work with smaller businesses. It's a volume business, but if you are in the right situation, it can be quite workable. Of 334 EAPs that I have set up or helped set up over a three-state area, the vast majority have had fewer than 100 employees.

EAPs are a process of economics—saving jobs, reducing turnover costs, improving productivity, and holding down theft. Small companies, like large companies, aren't immune to such problems; as Holloway pointed out, small companies are often hit harder by such problems than large companies. The loss of a strategic employee can be far more devastating to a small company than to a corporation like General Motors.

I particularly appreciated Holloway's comments about smaller companies not having a human resources function. The small companies that purchase our EAP use us as a human resources sounding board, as a legal sounding board, for advice on disciplinary actions and documentation, for training, and for seeking out inexpensive community resources to help their employees.

I disagree with Holloway that small companies are more "uninformed" than larger companies. In my experience, some small employers have been far more aware of what EAPs should do than large ones. In particular, smaller companies are less likely to see EAPs as "claims denial" processors than are larger companies.

Lastly, I must compliment Holloway on his statement that trust is the biggest selling point with a company, whether small or large. Flashy pamphlets and Powerpoint presentations may dazzle the eye, but when the next morning comes and a problem situation is at hand with an employee, employers will discover the truth in what you told/sold them. At that point, flash doesn't matter—service delivery matters.

Gary E. Fair, Director
ACCESS EAP
Via Christi Regional Medical Center
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Be Proactive, Not Reactive

by Maria Hartley, LEAP



Maria Hartley

Since their advent as occupational alcoholism programs, EAPs gradually have expanded their repertoire of services. From providing coaching and mentoring assistance to supervisors and executives to partnering with wellness and work-life providers, EAPs have sought to improve the health and performance of the workforce and add value to organizations they serve.

Responding to market trends and employer preferences in this way is effective and necessary for EAPs to stay viable. This “reactive” approach, however, risks positioning EAPs as nothing more than service centers peddling the latest health or productivity initiative to workers. It tends to tie us to remedial aspects of performance management, to the exclusion of facilitating the growth of performance potential. To tap into this growth and developmental arena, EA professionals must interface with employers at the strategic level, helping them analyze risks and strengths, develop plans, and maximize opportunities.

This is especially true of workplace trauma response, an EAP service that employers value highly. The public’s perception of workplace trauma—and that of many business leaders—is of mass disasters such as the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. The underlying reality is that many traumatic incidents are of a much more intimate nature, such as robberies and workplace accidents. But planning for these is no less important than planning for larger-scale disasters.

As the theme articles in this issue of the *Journal* make clear, managing the response to a traumatic workplace event requires planning and coordination. EA professionals are most effective when they have a seat at the corporate table

so they can help employers with the myriad details of trauma planning and response, such as—

- Assessing the organization for likely trauma scenarios;
- Analyzing safety, risk, and communications policies to ensure they address the needs of the business and its workers;
- Reviewing existing response plans and recommending changes;
- Considering “preventive” measures, such as developing a culture of caring and offering classes in emotional resiliency and stress management to employees; and
- Identifying after-effects of traumatic incidents (e.g., substance abuse and depression) and determining whether sufficient resources are in place to address them.

In addition to ensuring that our corporate clients are prepared to respond to a traumatic incident, it is important to take steps to prepare ourselves. We can practice self-care, stay current with the latest research, get trained, and familiarize ourselves with easily accessible resources. This allows us to provide effective response management as we determine which services are justified by the situation and who would be best served by them.

Staying current with research and training, participating in planning and strategy development, and identifying resources to assist workers are best practices that are particularly critical to managing workplace trauma. They also are integral to creating a pregnancy- and parent-friendly work environment and helping employers devise and implement smoking policies, the topics of the two feature articles in this issue.

For example, smoking has long

been “tolerated” by many employers, but some are now taking a harder line. They are imposing higher insurance premiums on smokers, refusing to hire smokers, and even telling them to stop smoking altogether (not just at work) or risk losing their jobs. EAPs, as strategic partners, can help employers think through the many implications of such policies and encourage them to adopt programs that demonstrate their support of workers affected by the new policies.

Being part of a strategic team will lead EAPs toward many opportunities employers value. The best assistance we can provide employers and employees is to be proactive, not reactive. ■

EAPA Communications Advisory Subcommittee

Maria Hartley • Chair • Columbia, S.C.
(803) 376-2668
mariapage@mchsi.com

Mark Attridge • Minneapolis, Minn.
(763) 797-2719
mark@attridgestudios.com

Nancy R. Board • Seattle, Wash.
(206) 615-2512
nboard@psc.gov

Tamara Cagney • Livermore, Calif.
(925) 294-2200
tcagney@sandia.gov

Joan Clark • Myrtle Beach, S.C.
(843) 449-8318
copingeap@sc.rr.com

Mark Cohen • Rockville Center, N.Y.
(516) 536-1570
mcohenintlcons@aol.com

Eduardo Lambardi • Buenos Aires, Argentina
5411-4706-0390
elambardi@eaplata.com

John Maynard • EAPA Headquarters
(703) 387-1000
ceo@eapassn.org

Bruce Prevatt • Tallahassee, Fla.
(904) 644-2288
bprevatt@admin.fsu.edu