

Journal of **Employee Assistance**

The magazine of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association

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Assisting Uninsured Workers and Their Dependents

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Employee Assistance as Knowledge Work

Addressing Overeating and Yo-Yo Dieting Disorders

New Opportunities for EAPs in Europe



Employee Assistance
Professionals Association

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Making Do When Insurance Doesn't

by Maria Hartley, LEAP

With each passing year, more and more Americans are becoming uninsured. According to the Census Bureau, roughly 46.6 million Americans lacked health insurance coverage during 2005, up from 45.3 million the previous year. All told, nearly one in every six U.S. residents is without health insurance coverage, a percentage that is likely to increase in the coming years.

Among certain groups of people, the rate of "uninsurance" is much higher. More than 30 percent of Americans ages 18-24 are uninsured, while 25 percent of those in the 25-34 age group also lack insurance. One in three Hispanics lacks health insurance, as does one in five African-Americans.

Many people who are uninsured are employed and have access to EAP services. Most of them work part-time or for employers that can't afford insurance.

Even in organizations where insurance is provided, many workers forego health care coverage because they can't afford it. A study by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that between 1998 and 2003, the percentage of workers enrolled in their employers' health care plans fell by 5 percent, primarily because the premium for individual coverage rose 42 percent during that period.

In light of these trends, it is imperative for us, as partners to business leaders, to consult on health insurance and employee assistance program planning so long-term health care and productivity costs don't get traded for short-term plan savings. It is also our place to work with employers on their program communications and promotions so that available benefits and resources are used to best advantage. By reaching out to

workers to let them know about the availability of assessment and referral to a whole host of services, we can make a difference.

Comprehensive, professional assessment and referral, in which EA professionals are well versed, are very important to uninsured workers. EA professionals can catch underlying problems early; we can assess for a broad range of mental health, physical health, work, and life issues; and we have considerable knowledge of community resources and consumer rights. Even when we identify the best care, financial counseling to help budget and pay for needed health care can determine whether the client follows through to obtain care.

This issue of the *Journal* explores in greater detail the challenges facing uninsured and under-insured workers and discusses how EAPs can assist them (by helping find free and low-cost resources) and their employers (by helping retain workers and facilitate productivity). One article describes how an EAP for a restaurant chain assists uninsured workers, who comprise the bulk of the company's employees; another article focuses on substance abuse among uninsured workers and explains how EAPs can help addicted workers make optimal use of available resources.

In addition to the theme articles, this issue also contains features on exit interviews, compulsive eating, the aging workforce, the changing outlook for EAPs in Europe, and employee assistance as "knowledge work." This issue also contains the inaugural installment of a new column, titled "First Person," in which employee assistance professionals share experiences that deepened their understanding, and improved their prac-

tice, of employee assistance. I think this column has the potential to add a much-needed personal perspective to issues that affect our profession.

By the time you read this column, many of you will already have made final preparations to attend the 2007 EAPA Conference in San Diego. As always, the Communications Advisory Subcommittee will be meeting at the conference to discuss topics that deserve attention in upcoming issues of the *Journal*. I encourage you to submit your ideas for theme topics to me or any other member of the committee.



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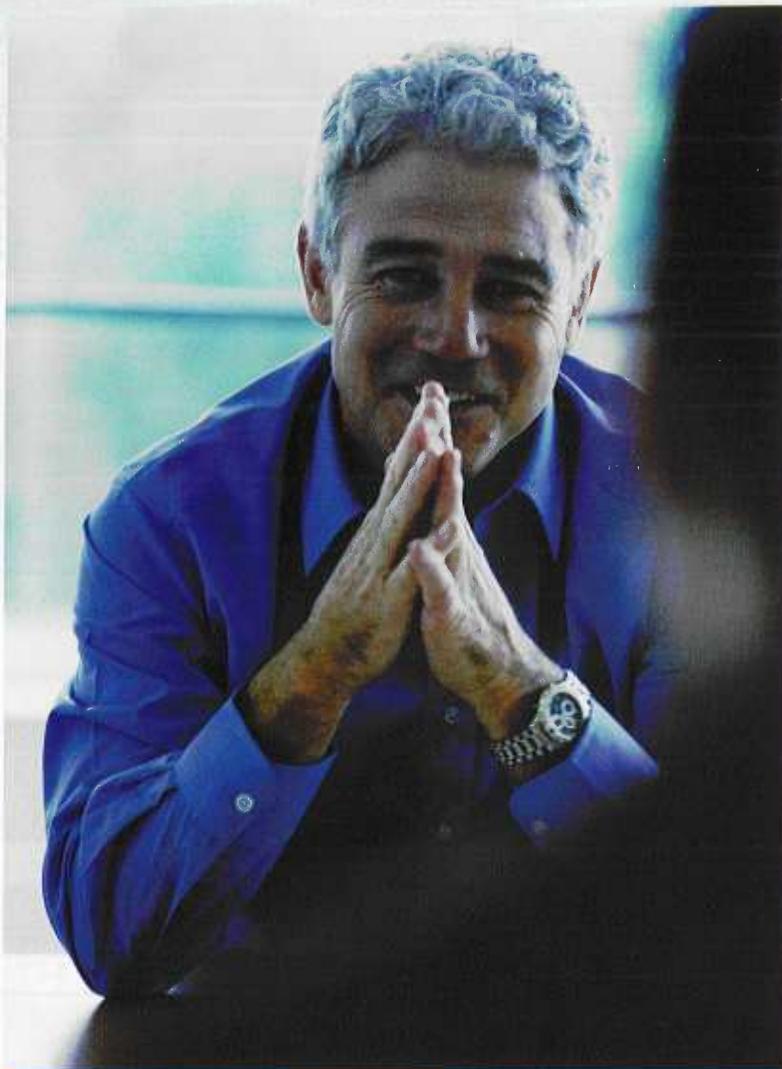
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EAPA Mission Statement

To promote the highest standards of practice and the continuing development of employee assistance professionals and programs.

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EA Practice as Knowledge Work

Defining employee assistance as knowledge work supports professional credibility, increases organizational value, and provides an alternative to the commodity-based benefits model popular with human resources managers.

by Daniel Hughes, Ph.D., CEAP

Over the course of my career, my understanding of employee assistance practice has evolved. Recently, I have begun to think of the work we do as a specialized form of “knowledge work” (Reich 2001). My thinking has been influenced by changes in the workplace and ongoing discussions among EAP practitioners and others regarding the value and marketing of employee assistance services.

In the following discussion, I propose a framework designed to help practitioners understand and discuss EA practice as a form of knowledge work. I submit that such a framework is consistent with the emergence of a knowledge-based economy and serves to sustain the professional status and value of the field.

THE CHANGING WORKPLACE

The contemporary workplace is a dynamic socio-economic environment undergoing rapid change. It is expected that during the next 10 to 15 years, the nature of work will be shaped by shifting demographic trends, technological innovation, and the accelerating pace of economic globalization (Karoly and Panis 2004).

In the United States, the pace of workforce growth will decline and the total number of employees in the labor force will level off. The workforce will

become progressively older as the “baby boom” generation ages; as the boomers retire, it is expected that labor shortages will occur because Generation X, the succeeding age cohort, is significantly smaller (Bridges and Cicero 2007).

Throughout this process, the American workforce will become more culturally diverse, with Asian and Hispanic populations growing most rapidly (Judy and D’Amico 1997).

Moving forward, economic growth will depend on increased productivity. Recent developments in information technology have already led to profound changes in both the structure of work organizations and conditions of employment (e.g., outsourcing, offshoring, telecommuting, and e-lancing). Inevitably, there will be cross-cutting synergies between information management, biomedical science, and nanotechnology, with advances in one sector accelerating developments in the others.

As a result of these synergies, advanced economies are likely to become more knowledge-based and less industry-intensive, as manufacturing jobs move to geographical locations with lower labor and production costs. Work organizations will become increasingly dependent on the development, retention, and transfer of knowledge, thus placing a premium on a skilled, highly educated workforce.

Globalization, which has led to fierce economic competition, is creating an advantage for economies with skilled workforces. Like investment capital, workers and jobs have become increasingly mobile. It is likely that immigration policy will become an increasingly contentious issue in many countries (witness

the United States), as both skilled and unskilled workers migrate to seek employment opportunities. Similarly, new systems of production and distribution are evolving, with corresponding changes in global markets.

These rapid and sweeping changes have led to the creation of a new global workplace in which employees and organizations face special problems as they struggle to adjust to new and dynamic circumstances. From auto workers in Detroit to expatriate managers in Shanghai, stress is pervasive and behavioral health issues are affecting performance. It is within this shifting context of economic globalization and labor market vulnerability that the employee assistance profession is being challenged to define its relevance.

KNOWLEDGE WORK

According to Nonaka (2007), “in an economy where the only certainty is uncertainty, the one source of competitive advantage is knowledge.” Successful enterprises are “those that consistently create new knowledge, disseminate it widely ... and quickly embody it in new technologies.”

Over the past 25 years, knowledge-based work has increased greatly and become a major economic driver. Such work often requires higher education, advanced training, and interdisciplinary perspectives (DeLong 2004). Accordingly, the term “knowledge work” has evolved to describe the activities and products of highly trained individuals who create advances in many diverse fields, including science, engineering, commerce, and education (Reich 2001).

Knowledge work also includes the



Dan Hughes is the director of the Mount Sinai Medical Center's employee assistance program (EAP) and an assistant professor of community and preventive medicine, Mount Sinai School of Medicine. He serves as the chair of EAPA's research subcommittee.