

Crossing Borders and Cultures

Highlights from 2013 World EAP Conference

Editor's note: Going to EAPA's annual World EAP Conference isn't something that every EA professional can afford to do. As a result, the intent of this article is to pass along some of the key findings from this important gathering to enlighten those who were not able to attend. Watch for more in-depth articles from some of these sessions in future issues of both the *Employee Assistance Report (EAR)* and EAPA's *Journal of Employee Assistance (JEA)*, which is edited and designed by Impact Publications, publishers of this newsletter.

"EAP Heats Up: Flourishing into the Future" was the theme at the Employee Assistance Professional Association's 2013 World EAP Conference, held Oct. 16-19 at the Arizona Biltmore in Phoenix. The first day of the conference began for me with a closer look at the new "EA Specialist, Clinician (EAS-C)" certificate training, led by *Judy Beahan, Robert Intveld, Marina London, and Tracy McPherson*. An in-depth article about the EAS-C appears in the December 2013 *EAR* and the 4th quarter issue of the *JEA*. More information on EAPA's new certificate of recognition is also available at www.easpassn.org/EASpecialist.

The highlight of day one was the annual *EAPA Marketplace Grand Opening Reception*. The event is a great way to meet the conference exhibitors to network and see what types of products and services they offer. Some of the nearly 100 vendors included: Adolescent Growth, Inc., CareLike, Crisis Care Network, Eldercare Locator, Hazelden, Recovery Trek, and many others.

DAY TWO -- Darrell Scott, founder of Rachel's Challenge, and father of Rachel Scott, the first student killed at Columbine High School in 1999, presented the *opening keynote*. The presentation offered a moving and inspiring example of how even small, deliberate acts of kindness and acceptance can start a chain reaction of kindness and compassion that empowers us to positively affect the culture and climate of workplaces, schools, and communities. Rachel's message has reached millions. It's doubtful there was a dry eye in the house.

With roughly 50 sessions to choose from, the most difficult decisions at the conference involved selecting which ones to attend! Breakout sessions I went to on Day Two included:

*** Screening and Brief Intervention for At-Risk Drinking: Outcomes Six Months Later** – Presented by *Susan Baker, David Lower, and Patricia McKee*, this panel examined whether screening and brief intervention (SBI) is effective by sharing data from an SBI initiative implemented in a call center. Of the 4,047 employees screened in the presenters' study, 28% screened positive for AUDIT-C, short for the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test, a screening tool for identifying people who are hazardous drinkers or who have alcohol use disorders. Of those who screened positive, Baker said 75% were female, a fact the presenters did not consider surprising. The heavier drinkers in the SBI group had a greater reduction in drinking due to declining absenteeism and other factors. Overall "takeaways" for practitioners utilizing SBI were:

- * Be prepared to listen to "change talk" by clients;
- * Respond to the client's autonomy – and his/her ability to problem solve, not just that of the practitioner;
- * Be sure of going through doors that the *client* opens; and
- * Ensure that client and practitioner are working *together*.

A surprise in the findings was that SBI did not lead to the dramatic decreases envisioned. (Due to the presentation of unpublished research, this session was not included in EAPA's Conference On Demand.)

*** Best Practices for Surveying EAP Clients: Validate the Case for Your EAP** – Offered by *James Harting* and *Dave Sharar*, the presenters reviewed how, when done well, outcome-driven surveys can

increase client response rates and satisfaction. The presenters said it's important to examine this topic because a low survey response rate introduces bias and uncertainty while a *high* response rate reduces selection bias and enhances EAP credibility. Reasons cited for not responding to a survey included:

- * Too busy;
- * Survey was too long;
- * Low interest or the questions weren't relevant; and
- * Survey fatigue.

And what is a good response rate? They said 50% is generally considered the minimum; but a 19% response rate is more typical. Strategies that Harting and Sharar presented for enhancing return rates for EAP surveys were:

- * Mix up the delivery methods (e.g. email, phone, etc.);
- * Make survey projects a specific staff responsibility;
- * To reduce chances of emails going to spam, get on a certified whitelist (e.g. ReturnPath.com);
- * Obtain consent and reassure that the survey is confidential;
- * Give an approximate date for follow-up at intake;
- * Obtain good "locator" info at intake (e.g. what is the best way to reach the person – work phone, cell, etc.);
- * Consider issuing a reminder about the survey before sending it; and
- * Develop "rapport" at intake and explain the reason for future contact.

"You have to work really hard on the *front* end to get good locator information *later*," Sharar said. "A side benefit to good response rates is that it can lead to more follow up in other areas of EAP," Harting concluded.

*** Workplace Implications of the Opiate Addiction Epidemic and Synthetic Drug Misuse** – *Jeffrey Reynolds* and *Stephanie Siete* explained how prescription opiate addiction is now considered a national public health emergency in the U.S. Drugs such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, and methadone are among those abused – known better by brand names such as OxyContin, Vicodin, and Darvon.

"There has been a fivefold increase in the past decade in treatment admissions for prescription medications," Reynolds stated. Why? Pain relief, especially among returning veterans and an aging population, was cited as a big reason. While drugs *are* used for legitimate pain use, they are generally designed more for acute pain, and not chronic pain, Reynolds said.

Workplace addiction occurs rapidly and leads to absenteeism, presenteeism, higher health care costs, theft, litigation risks, and workplace incidents and accidents.

Siete presented a slew of disturbing statistics that illustrate the strength and quick addiction to many newer synthetic drugs. Drugs such as "bath salts" and Krokodil, for instance, are even more powerful and addictive than their heroin and meth counterparts, Siete explained. "We're talking addiction and effects that only take hours, weeks, and months, not years," she said. "Fentanyl is 40 times stronger than heroin, but made to look like other pills, such as Viagra."

Because synthetic drugs are difficult to detect, she said schools often have more authority than police in dealing with them – hence she stressed that EA professionals working in addiction need to train school administrators about the dangers of these drugs. Useful websites she passed along were: www.dea.gov, www.medreturn.com and www.medicineabuseproject.org.

DAY THREE – There wasn't a chair to be found at the informative session, **The Cutting Edge: Two Research Studies on the Current State of EAPs**, moderated by *Bernie McCann*, and presented by *Dirk Antonissen*, *Terry Cahill*, *Stanford Granberry*, and *Manuel Somner*. The presentation featured results of

two privately funded studies by the Employee Assistance Research Foundation, one undertaken by ISW Limits, and the other by the National Behavioral Consortium (NBC).

Granberry served as the primary investigator for the NBC “Industry Profile of External EAP Vendors.” Portions of the extensive NBC research have begun to be published, including “Mergers & Acquisitions: A Neglected Area of EAP Literature” in the 2nd quarter 2013 issue of the *JEA*. A follow-up article is planned for this year.

Somner and Antonissen were among the investigators for ISW Limits’ “Eureka: An Employee Services Perception Study in Continental Europe.” Countries studied were: Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Greece. “Hopefully, this study will help to put EAPs and mental health in general, higher on the agenda for European policy makers,” the researchers wrote. Additional information on both studies is offered at: www.eapfoundation.org.

* **Digital Intervention Supporting Expats: Helping Anytime, Anywhere**, was led by *Paul Wittes* and *Barbara Veder* with Shepell.fgi. The focus of the session was on addressing how organizations can use digital technology to enhance the probability for success on international assignments. Who exactly are “expats”? Wittes said only 11% are new hires, with 30-39 being the most common age group. The top five locations for expatriates are the U.S., U.K., China, Singapore and India.

Overall failure rate is 6%; with “failure” defined as premature return from an international assignment. According to Wittes, expatriate challenges that increase risk of failure include: back-to-back assignments (similar to the cumulative trauma seen among veterans with multiple deployments), personal/family adjustments, lack of social support, and language/communication barriers.

While cultural and other challenges are inherent, the presenters stressed that digital service options, such as e-counseling, video counseling, and other online tools, DO help. “With 24/7 online access, there are no time zones or borders – it’s a giant paradigm shift in our profession,” they said. “Global services are evolving day to day and we [EAP] must keep pace.”

* **The Biggest Little Untapped Market: EAP Practice with Small Businesses**, was presented by *Kate Aronoff*, *Maureen Casey*, and *Chris Knoepke* with Peer Assistance Services. Small businesses are gaining in prominence and importance in the U.S. labor market, and the presenters offered practical advice on how to help EAP better tap into that market.

Among small businesses, nearly 90% have fewer than 20 employees, who have a lack of access to EAP and other benefits. Small business vulnerabilities include, among others, a lack of HR policies and drug testing, higher turnover, and no checks and balances. Financial constraints and confidentiality are among EAP challenges in these businesses, the presenters said.

The PAS staff used several audience role-playing exercises to illustrate the differences in how an EA professional might help a small business owner resolve a particular problem – as opposed to a larger employer, who would likely have clearer policies. “Small businesses have high need for services,” but there are unique considerations for working with small business owners, they wrote.

DAY FOUR – EAPA’s annual World EAP Conference wrapped up its last morning with its annual fun run/walk, keynote from *Mark Attridge* on the business value of EAP, breakout sessions, and the annual awards luncheon and address from EAPA President *Steven Haught*.

Afternoon “super sessions” (two hours as opposed to one hour) included a distinguished panel of tech-savvy professionals – including *Marina London* and *Barb Veder* – who discussed what’s next in terms of social media, online technologies and apps; and a multi-cultural view of EAP services offered by *Jenny Espinoza*, *Dirk Antonissen* and others.

For more information on the conference, visit www.eapassn.org/onDemand.

CAPTION – The beautiful Arizona Biltmore, whose guests have included presidents and movie stars, was the site of the 2013 World EAP Conference in Phoenix.

CAPTION – *EAR* and *JEA* Editor Mike Jacquart poses with Maria Lund, president and COO of First Sun EAP, at Chestnut Global Partners' Friday reception at the Wrigley Mansion.

CAPTION – After a busy day, it was not difficult to unwind at the serene Arizona Biltmore, site of this year's World EAP Conference.