EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT
supporting EAP professionals
NEW! Supporting Our Veterans
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EAPs Play Crucial Role in the Changing World of Substance Abuse

By RaeAnn Thomas

Clients of employee assistance services seek to cope with a variety of issues, including work, family, and mental health problems. But one particular issue brings us back to our EAP roots: *addiction and substance abuse*.

> ***"However, the long-term nature of 'less-restrictive' intervention can produce* better *treatment outcomes, and in a more* cost-effective *model."***

While "traditional" substance abuse remains a problem for many employees and their families, *new* drugs and *new* methods of treatment have changed the landscape. Supervisors and administrators of our corporate clients need to be aware of the ever-changing world of substance abuse, and the resources that are available to assist those affected. EA professionals are an indispensable resource in providing this crucial information and training.

Dealing with drug and alcohol problems are at the core of our mission, as EAPs evolved from the need to address these issues to prevent them from having serious effects on the workplace. We often kick off new programs with a supervisor training that introduces managers to the challenges of dealing with employee substance abuse. Most EAPs educate managers about patterns of problem behavior. This includes recognizing the problem, and providing constructive confrontation and effective follow up after the referral to EAP. The question is: *Have you updated that training lately?*

New Abuse Issues

We still see many individuals for alcohol abuse or dependence. Alcohol has been a central part of the supervisor training that we offer. However, there has also been an increase in the use of *other* addictive substances. Prescription drug abuse, which includes sharing prescriptions and transitioning from appropriate use of a prescription to abuse; and use of street drugs are a few of the problems that we tend to miss in a brief training.

New drugs are being manufactured in our communities every day. Employees and their families are exposed to substances, or cocktails of multiple substances that can cause great harm or death.

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Featured Inside

The addictive power of street drugs may be surprising to some. We may be routinely interacting with employees who are addicted to heroin. This is *not* something we covered in our basic supervisor training program!

As resource experts for the companies we serve, we can enhance the services we provide by including relevant information in our training to teach supervisors about the new substance abuse challenges they may encounter. Drugs we hoped had disappeared from the scene forever are making a return. Recognizing the substances themselves and the potential employee behavior one may witness in an employee who is under the influence, would prove very valuable to the company and its managers. EAP can help those managers become aware of drugs commonly abused, and what their effects may look like in the workplace. We can use our resource network of community educators, direct clinical service providers, and local law enforcement to learn about current drug use trends.

But we don't need to reinvent the wheel. Many community experts would be happy to collaborate with an EAP to bring their message to an interested audience. Training that addresses reasonable suspicion testing is inadequate in instances where daily intoxication is the norm. Our standard training on this issue simply doesn't fly in the face of today's realities. The good news is: We are in a position to bring community resource experts in this area *directly* to the *audience* where they can do a great deal of good.

New Resources

Drugs aren't the only things that have changed in the world of addiction and substance abuse. Treatment isn't what it used to be either. Many people have very little understanding of the way treatment has changed over the years. Long inpatient stays have become less common, and are often not even available. Community-based treatment, transitional living and outpatient medical management have provided employees with the opportunity to remain at work for a large part of their early recovery.

Return-to-work meetings can often be replaced with Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) plans for employers to help them implement flexible work schedules that allow for a more protracted, community-based treatment plan. In order to be cost-effective and produce the best possible outcome, employees may spend only a short time in a medical/ inpatient facility for the purpose of detoxification. They move into a program that will allow them to return very quickly to work, though sometimes with the need for intermittent leave to attend ongoing treatment services.

This offers EAP the opportunity to assist supervisors in understanding the *reality* of substance abuse and its treatment. It is *not* an illness of specific duration, for which the employee can simply participate in an intense treatment program and return to work "cured" from the disease. The reality of effective treatment is that it will remain for a substantial amount of time, which will differ for each individual. However, the long-term nature of "less-restrictive" intervention can produce *better* treatment outcomes, and in a more *cost-effective* model.

Continued contact with the treatment program allows the patient to bring new skills and behaviors into their lives, to build healthy coping skills and habits, all with the ongoing support of the program that helped them make those changes at the start of recovery.

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New Opportunities

As employee benefits also evolve, we are in a unique position to educate and consult with our client companies about the *types* of services available, providers with proven track records, and the reality of how those resources can

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align with the employee's health and medical coverage. We can educate about the changing nature of treatment and help Human Resources examine these generalized employee's needs in a creative way that will bring the best outcome and greatest efficiency to their organization.

Enhancing our Drug Free Workplace and Supervisor Training curriculum to include current issues and resources will make the training more relevant and effective toward the goal of keeping prohibited substances from having negative effects on the workplace. It will also open the eyes of many individuals who have resisted assistance in managing a substance abuse problem, but who do this because of their misunderstanding about treatment.

Historically, we have built our training on the basics: *recognizing behavior patterns, constructive confrontation with the employee, and referral to EAP*. The remaining continuum of care has simply been a vague understanding that EAP must be doing *something* to help the employee with the problem.

A *better* plan may be to start with the company's <u>drug-free workplace policy</u>, <u>testing policy</u>, and <u>consequences</u>. EAP can use those policies as a springboard to educate about what substances employees may use, what drugs supervisors may encounter, and move into the types of evidence-based treatment that are being offered today. We can expand education further by talking about what *local* resources are available. It is a rare instance in which an employee enters a treatment program that is hundreds of miles from home, and is discharged upon completion with no transition to continuing care where they live.

Summary

Employee assistance professionals have been offering substance abuse support, education and intervention for a long time. Today, it has become clear that we must also seize the opportunity to provide *real value* to the organizations we serve, to assist the decision makers, managers, and co-workers in effectively addressing this issue as it relates to the workplace. We need to update substance abuse and addiction trainings *now*. ■

RaeAnn Thomas, a long-time contributor to EAR and former contributing editor, is the Executive Director of Associated Employee Assistance Services (www.aeas-eap.com). She may be reached at raeann.thomas@ministryhealth.org.

Editor's Notebook

There are a number of important articles in this newsletter I'd like to briefly discuss, so I'll cut to the chase. This month's cover story by RaeAnn Thomas discusses how *new* drugs and *new* methods of treatment have changed the substance abuse landscape in recent years. HR doesn't always know what treatment will entail, clients need to understand that today's treatments are more individualized and supportive… *and* EA professionals need to know that they will have a role in aftercare with the employee.

I've been told that substance abuse is a *big* topic in EAP these days, and so we hope that, between this article and the one by Hazelden in the February *EAR*, we've addressed at least a reasonable number of the issues you're running into today.

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Speaking of topics that are in demand, an increasing number of resources are addressing the needs of veterans returning to the workplace. A NEW regular column appears in this issue that will discuss various aspects of this important subject.

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Finally, the impact that the PPACA is having on EAP has circulated numerous questions. Some important distinctions are explained in this month's issue. Feel free to call or email me about these, or any other articles in *EAR*. Until next time.

Mike Jacquart

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Resources

The Salary Talk: Eliminating the Angst of Discussing Pay with Employees, $99, PDF download, PBP Executive Reports, (800) 220-5000, www.pbpexecutivereports.com. Talking about money is emotional, and most managers haven't been trained to handle this difficult conversation effectively. This report explains how to do it right.

The Barefoot Spirit: How Hardship, Hustle and Heart Built a Bestselling Wine, by Bonnie Harvey and Michael Houlihan, Evolve Publishing, www.thebarefootspirit.com. The authors explain how to confront mistakes and view them as opportunities to learn and grow. ■

Presentations That Require You to THINK – Part I

By Kevin E. O'Connor, CSP

Too many presenters say things like: *"I know you can't read this but…"* or "*This is pretty dull stuff so I'll try to get through it quickly."*

These (and more) are indicators of two things: the presenter is a rank amateur, and the audience has once again been noble enough not to string them up by their thumbs!

In reality, these presenters are not amateurs in their field. They are accomplished professionals who know their stuff but they don't know how to convey it. The audience is eager, open and wants the speaker to succeed. Our corporate culture, however, has intimidated audiences into being polite and placid. Presenting technical, complicated material need not be a chore when you T.H.I.N.K.!

Transform how you think about your role

Your first job is to be a memory-maker, so don't be the supplier of solely facts and data. You are there to present and inform, but more importantly, you are there to create a learning environment. A community of learners is there to unite around your message and learn something from it. Presentations should focus on digesting content into directly-applicable skills. Because any subject can be presented with interest and enthusiasm, you can transform your mindset from that of a lecturer to a role more like a preacher, counselor or facilitator.

Hunt for the essence of your content

When you simplify, you stand a greater chance of being a supreme educator. While coaching a sales representative from a Fortune 500 company, a consultant was told the rep feared that "dumbing things down" for his audience would reduce his credibility. The consultant encouraged the rep to speak with elegant simplicity, as that would engage customers into thinking of the meeting as a conversation. This allowed the sales rep to directly respond to the client's most pressing questions. Imagine the difference that this rep saw when he began the conversation by sharing four quotes from consumers who had used the product, and explained the results they had experienced. Outcomes, after all, are the essence of why anyone tries new products or services.

NEXT MONTH: The remaining THINK points (I, N and K) are presented. ■

Kevin E. O'Connor, CSP is a facilitator, medical educator, and author. His latest book, Fearless Facilitation, is due out this year. For more information, visit www.kevinoc.com.

Quick Ideas

Workplace Do's and Don'ts

❖ DO respond constructively when someone presents an idea.

❖ DO push for solutions.

❖ DO conduct tough talks in person.

❖ DO set goals and hold yourself and employees accountable for results.

❖ DON'T let negativity become your "go-to" response.

❖ DON'T give in to the temptation to whine. It doesn't get anyone anywhere.

❖ DON'T leave critical or harsh messages on voice mail or send them to an email inbox.

❖ DON'T confuse activity with progress.

Source: Jon Gordon, author of "Soup: A Recipe to Nourish Your Team and Culture," www.soup11.com.

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Signs of Employee Discontent

Working with management to resolve an underperforming employee can sometimes prove to be a fruitless task when the EA professional is called in too late in the game to be of real help.

The good news is; many disgruntled, overwhelmed, or unhappy workers show signs of their discontent. Making managers aware of these signs and working with them sooner, rather than later, can help a great deal. Behaviors to be on the lookout for include:

❖ The employee comes in later or leaves earlier than usual.

❖ The employee withdraws from extra projects.

❖ The employee exhibits declining performance, or does just enough to get by.

❖ The employee complains a lot.

❖ Co-workers complain about this individual.

❖ The employee makes wistful references about other companies.

❖ The employee makes nostalgic references to employees who have left.

❖ The employee talks about being "burned out." ■

Source: Harvard Business Review article, "Employee Retention: What Managers Can Do."

Clarifying Workplace Boundaries

Workplace boundaries have never been more blurred ever since we started connecting with our colleagues online. Around 70% of workers are online friends with fellow employees and even the boss. But experts warn that sharing too much information online, or in person, can kill an employee's dreams of a promotion and even earn an individual a pink slip. Here are some tips anyone can use to connect with co-workers while still keeping one's professional credentials:

❖ **Being Facebook friends with a boss doesn't make you best buddies – so keep your profile work-friendly**. It's natural to feel close to a boss when you see personal photos and status updates. But that doesn't mean an employee should express his/her "wild side" online. A photo of swilling beer doesn't help one's professional image – and the boss may wonder if you're coming into work hung-over. Keep one's personal life undercover by adjusting the page's privacy settings so that certain posts and pictures are off-limits to co-workers.

❖ **Never swap soap opera stories with the boss**. Even if the boss spills about the wild bachelor party he just attended, that's *not* an invite for employees to spill *their* outrageous stories. Here's a good rule of thumb: tell half as many personal stories as your boss. If they get personal twice a week, you get personal *once* a week. And never share anything that belongs on a reality show.

❖ **Beware of office happy hour**. Sure, you're physically out of the office, so it *feels* like you're hanging with your friends not your co-workers. But mentally you should stay in office mode! That's because anything someone says can be used against them! For instance, an employee who says that he/she secretly hates his/her job could easily get back to the boss. An employee should be sure to say only what the individual would feel comfortable saying in front of the CEO. ■

Source: John Tesh: Intelligence for Your Life (www.tesh.com).

Supporting Our Veterans

Veterans Employment Toolkit Introduced

The Department of Veterans Affairs has developed a new online Veterans Employment Toolkit. The toolkit was designed to help employers, managers and supervisors, EAP and HR professionals support veterans in the workplace.

The online toolkit provides information about the value veterans bring to the workplace, material describing the military experience and culture, common challenges vets may experience in readjusting to civilian life and how to support individuals during that transition.

For more information, visit http://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace.■

***Editor's note**: This is a new feature focusing on hands-on, practical information for veterans that will be appearing on a regular basis in Employee Assistance Report.*

Money Matter$

Making Smart Spending Decisions

By Gary Foreman

I recently received a letter that read: *"Can you help me develop a way to control family spending? I want to come up with spending criteria that's fact based and removes emotional elements. What would you include in the criteria and do you think that the idea would work for people who tend to buy on the spur of the moment?" – Sherri*

Sherri has asked two questions that should interest all of us. "How do you make spending decisions?" and "Can you reduce them to a logical, factual basis?

Let's begin by looking at how we make decisions. There's the way that we *should* make decisions and the way that marketers would *like* us to make them.

The goal of the multi-billion dollar advertising industry is to convince you that you want their product and that you can afford it (even if that means making payments or charging it). Sadly, many of us go along with these pitches and spend ourselves into a corner.

A more correct model would be to do as Sherri suggests. You would need to answer "yes" to a number of questions before buying something. A "no" along the way would prevent the purchase.

You can create your own series of steps, but here's a list to help you get started:

❖ **Do I need the item?** Not want it, but *need* it. Sometimes this won't be black and white. I need to eat dinner, but do I *need* the premade "salad in a bag" or can I make it myself?

❖ **Can something else fill the same need?** A tea maker might be handy, but you don't need something special to make tea.

❖ **Could I rent or borrow it**? Maybe you don't need to buy a dress for a wedding if a sister has one that you could borrow.

❖ **Can I afford it?** This does NOT mean… Can I afford the payments! Do I have enough room under my credit limit? Is there room in my budget for this purchase?

❖ **Are there any cheaper alternatives?** Could I buy something else that would do the job for less? Could I get a better deal on the same product from another store or company?

❖ **Will I regret this purchase tomorrow or a year from now?**

The second part of Sherri's strategy is more difficult. Can any of us completely separate our emotions from buying decisions? I'm afraid that the answer is probably "no."

We can *minimize* the emotional element of spending by following a list of questions that will help us recognize the facts surrounding a purchase. But our emotions and life experiences will affect how we answer those questions.

You might think*: "I don't need a new pair of shoes."* But if you spent your childhood patching worn-out shoes, an extra pair might seem like a good decision. Your emotions will probably override logic and make the choice.

Having a set pattern for making purchasing decisions is a good idea. We'd all benefit from using one.

However, if Sherri finds that her family is making emotional buys, trying to force logical decisions on them might not work. She may need to encourage family members to do a little self-analysis to see *why* they make specific purchases. ■

Gary Foreman is a former purchasing manager who currently edits The Dollar Stretcher website (www.stretcher.com).

Flexible Work Benefits WORK

Providing employees with flexible work options like elastic schedules, support benefits and care arrangements for children will reap employers a return though increased loyalty and lower sick leave rates, research has found.

The findings – which reflect those from various other flexible work studies – were part of research conducted by Charles Sturt University. The study questioned 219 managers or owners about their strategies for keeping employees happy and motivated.

The results broke down flexible work options into four categories:

❖ Flexible work options, such as flexi-time, allowing staff to set their own schedules;

❖ Leave programs, such as paid maternity and paternity leave;

❖ Support benefits, which includes **employee assistance providers**; and

❖ Care arrangements, such as on-site childcare.

"Overall, the research showed that each of these issues had a direct and positive impact on work-life balance," said CSU researcher and teacher Stacey Jenkins.

Speaking to *SmartCompany*, Jenkins said there was a clear correlation between the companies that offered these types of services, and effects such as lower staff turnover and sick leave days.

"There are definitely indirect associations you can make with stress. If someone is able to access flexible start and finish times, they're much less likely to be stressed and that has an impact on their performance."

While Jenkins acknowledged some of these practices are not so easy in certain industries, such as retail, they're still important. "Employees are more likely to stay with you if you offer these types of benefits and they have options," she said.

Some of the major benefits that were listed as having a direct impact on performance included flexi-time, telecommuting, part-time work, shorter work days, flexible start and finish times, and **employee assistance programs**. ■

Additional source: EAP NewsBrief, a service of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (www.eapassn.org).

Workplace Survey

Take a Lunch Break!

Taking a lunch break can nourish your mind as well as your body, suggests findings of a new survey by The Creative Group.

More than 4 in 10 (44%) of executives interviewed said leaving the office during their lunch break makes them more productive. Further, when asked to describe the best activity for stimulating creative thinking at work, employees cited "stepping away from your desk," which second only to brainstorming with colleagues.

A brief breakdown is as follows:

Top Ways to Stimulate Creative Thinking

- Brainstorm with colleagues: 37%
- Step away from your desk: 29%
- Listen to music: 15%.

Productivity on Days Leave Office during Lunch Break

- Much more, to somewhat more productive: 44%
- No more productive: 37%
- Don't take breaks: 9%
- Less productive: 7% ■

Source: The Creative Group (www.thecreativegroup.com).

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Impact of SBC Requirements on EAPs

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2012, represent one of the most significant regulatory overhauls of the United States health care system.

One of the most vital consumer tools found in the PPACA is the Summary of Benefits and Coverage (SBC). According to the PPACA, health insurance insurers and group health plans that offer group or individual health insurance coverage must compile and provide to their consumers a SBC document that describes in an easy-to-understand way the benefits and coverage under the applicable plan.

The question of whether an EAP must comply with the PPACA SBC disclosure requirements turns on the *types of services* it provides to its participants and their beneficiaries. If an EAP provides medical care, it would be required to furnish its participants and their beneficiaries with completed SBCs. However, an EAP that merely *refers* its participants and beneficiaries to third-party health care professionals would *not* be required to comply with SBC disclosure requirements.

SBC Questions and Answers

Questions have arisen about the practical impact of the PPACA SBC disclosure requirements. The following section addresses *some* of the most common questions. These answers are only relevant to those EAPs that provide medical services and are therefore considered "group health plans", subject to SBC disclosure requirements.

Q: *When do we have to start complying with the SBC disclosure requirements?*

A: Because EAP participants and their beneficiaries are enrolled automatically in an EAP, and not through an open-enrollment period, the SBC must be provided beginning on the first day of the first plan year that begins on or after Sept. 23, 2012.

Q: *How often do we have to furnish a SBC?*

A: Because EAP participants and their beneficiaries are enrolled automatically in an EAP, and not through an open-enrollment period, the SBC must be furnished on or before: (i) the day coverage begins, (ii) within 7 days of an EAP's receipt of a request by a participant or beneficiary, (iii) at least 30 days before the start of each new plan year, and (iv) within the first 90 days of coverage in the case of "special enrollees." (These are new participants or newly eligible participants who become enrolled in the middle of a plan year.)

Q: *Do we distribute the completed SBC or do our employer-customers?*

A: The onus is on the group health plan, meaning the EAP, to distribute the SBC. It is the obligation of the EAP to complete and distribute the SBC to the required recipients in accordance with the SBC disclosure requirements.

Q: *What if we have not properly complied with the SBC disclosure requirements under the PPACA thus far?*

A: During the first year that SBC disclosure requirements apply, no penalties will be assessed to group health plans that work in good faith to provide the required SBC content.

Disclaimer

The information in this article is not a substitute for seeking the advice of your own attorney or law firm. ■

Source: Paneet Leekha, J.D., an attorney at Popovits & Robinson P.C., a health care law firm that provides general counsel services and legal consultation to behavioral health care providers, EAPs, and others. ***Editor's note****: A more in-depth version of this article appeared in the 1st quarter 2013 issue of the Journal of Employee Assistance.*

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