

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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Prescription Painkiller Abuse *How it Impacts EAPs*

By Pablo McCabe and Jeff Mangrum, Hazelden

Deaths in this country from drug overdose, driven by the increase in prescription painkiller abuse, now outnumber those caused by car accidents. In fact, prescription drug abuse is the biggest addiction issue facing employers. According to the Centers for Disease Control:

“Painkillers left over from a tooth extraction or a hip replacement are free for the taking, and no one’s looking or counting.”

❖ Prescription painkiller overdoses killed nearly 15,500 people in the United States in 2009 – more than three times the 3,000 people killed by these drugs in 1999.

❖ In 2010, about 12 million Americans (age 12 or older) reported nonmedical use of prescription painkillers in the past year.

❖ Nearly half a million emergency department visits in 2009

were due to people misusing or abusing prescription painkillers.

The crisis is coming home to roost at Hazelden, one of the largest not-for-profit addiction treatment providers in the world. At our Center City, Minn. facility, for example, those seeking treatment for opioid addiction rose from 19% of patients in 2001 to 30% of patients in 2011. A similar jump was seen at Hazelden’s facility for young adults and adolescents in Plymouth, Minn., from 15% of patients in 2001 to 41% of patients in 2011.

Opioid addiction starts not on the mean streets but right at home in employees’ medicine cabinets: Painkillers left over from a tooth extraction or a hip replacement are free for the taking, and no one’s looking or counting. Opioid addiction progresses rapidly, and a naive experimenter soon finds himself or herself in a frantic race to stave off the miserable withdrawal symptoms.

What Makes Opioids so Hard for Employees to Kick?

When opioid molecules travel through the bloodstream into the

brain, they attach to specialized proteins on the surface of certain brain cells. The binding of these molecules with their target receptors triggers the same chemical response in the brain’s reward center that occurs with anything that causes intense pleasure or is intended to be reinforcing to survival. This is the part of the brain

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Practical Steps for EAPs

❖ **Include addiction in all EAP-related strategies:** be it prevention, intervention, treatment or disease management.

❖ **Promote an internal atmosphere in the organization that reduces “stigma”** surrounding treatment for addiction.

❖ **Publicize addiction treatment resources.**

❖ **Use confidential screening and assessment.** Hazelden has resources that can help, such as its free www.aboutmydrinking.org screening tool. There are also other Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) modules available to help people confront their drinking or drug use and get the help they need.

❖ **Review insurance policies.** In 2008, 93% of large employer plans said they offer addiction/mental health benefit. Coverage for substance abuse treatment makes it more likely that employees struggling with alcohol and drug problems will seek help proactively. Review corporate clients’ health insurance policies to see if substance abuse treatment is covered.

❖ **Make sure the substance abuse benefit covers a full continuum of care.** Even though health plans may offer a substance abuse benefit, make sure it offers a complete list of important, medically-necessary addiction services like inpatient care, residential treatment programs, intensive outpatient and outpatient care and continuing care for those in need of treatment and those who have begun the process of “recovery” and need your support and counsel. ■

- Pablo McCabe & Jeff Mangrum

that ensures our survival, by reinforcing acts such as eating, drinking fluids, caring for babies and having sex.

All rewarding and survival-based activities result in the release of dopamine in the brain’s reward center. *But opioids, like all drugs of abuse, trigger the release of dopamine in excess amounts, far beyond what is needed.* The brain has been signaled: something extremely important has taken place, and it needs to be repeated. Everyone exposed to opioids experiences excess dopamine release in the brain.

However, most people do not become addicted to opioids after such exposure. Experts are not entirely sure why, but it may be related to altered function of dopamine receptors in those predisposed to addiction.

But *prolonged* use of increasingly higher doses of opioids changes the brain so that it functions more or less normally when the drug is present and abnormally when the drug is removed. This alteration in the brain results in tolerance (the need to take higher and higher doses to achieve the same effect) and dependence (susceptibility to withdrawal symptoms).

Opioid withdrawal is one of the most powerful factors driving dependence and addictive behaviors. Withdrawal symptoms include agitation, anxiety, itching, irritability, insomnia, goose bumps, rapid heart rate, mild hypertension, vomiting and diarrhea. At the peak of withdrawal, intense anxiety, tremors, shakes, muscle cramps and joint and deep bone pain begin to manifest.

Down the road are other serious, long-term consequences. Anxiety, depression and craving for the drug can continue for months, even years after being free of opioid use.

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Workplace Toll

This addiction takes a toll on the employee, obviously, but also on their families and businesses – in the form of:

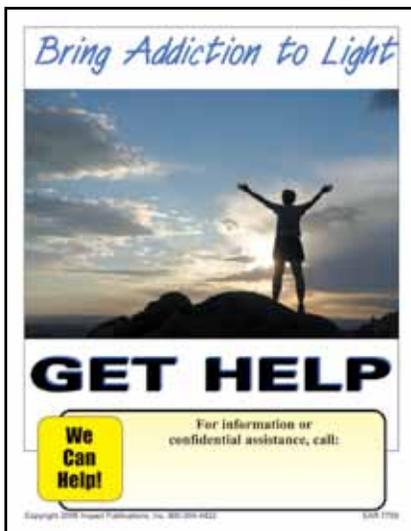
- Lower workplace productivity;
- Higher health care costs;
- Increased absenteeism and “presenteeism”;
- Lack of productivity;

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- Lower morale;
- Diminished quality control;
- Increased disability claims; and
- Greater workplace injuries and violence, and higher job turnover and employee theft.

As EA professionals, you can play a key role in helping your employees and their families identify substance abuse problems and get the care and treatment they need. Hazelden has resources that can help (www.hazelden.org), and there are other Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) modules available to help people confront their drinking or drug use and get the help they need. This doesn't need to take place with a specialist; a family physician's office may be the best medical setting for substance use screening and interventions.

The federal government is also taking steps to address the issue. The Office of National Drug Control Policy and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) recently unveiled a new web-based



Posters, such as those offered by Impact Publications (www.impact-publications.com) is one of the tools that EA professionals can use to increase awareness about prescription drug abuse in the workplace.



Editor's Notebook

Many thanks to Pablo McCabe and Jeff Mangrum of Hazelden for providing this month's cover story about prescription painkiller abuse. I was aware of this problem existing among today's teens, but I did not realize that the issue had become a problem in the workplace as well.

While the emphasis of the cover and *Brown Bagger* articles is on addressing substance abuse in general, regardless of age, the page 4 Handout section in the *BB* includes information specific to youth. The point is, regardless of the specific drug the suspected user is taking, or whether the user is a co-worker or the son or daughter of a colleague, we hope you are able to take advantage of this opportunity to educate corporate clients about this important topic.

Valentine's Day will be celebrated this month, and an inside article in this month's newsletter examines romance in the workplace. Is this issue a problem among any of YOUR corporate clients? Personally, I've only experienced this issue once in my 20-plus years in journalism, but the one time I did, at a daily newspaper I worked at, I'd have to say the fling compromised the integrity of the newsroom. It's a dicey topic, that's for sure. Until next time.

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program to help doctors more safely and effectively prescribe these powerful medications.

care costs are figured in, the cost offset ratio jumps to **\$12 saved** for every **\$1 spent**.

Health Care Reform

Health care reform is having an impact. The already-implemented provision that allows parents to keep their children on their health insurance plans until *the age of 26 increases the odds this vulnerable population will be able to receive the care they need to treat their addiction*. Rather than feel that this reform will only add costs to health care, it is important to remember that treating addiction ultimately lowers costs for a company in the long run. Studies show that every dollar spent on treating substance use disorders results in a \$7 savings through increased productivity and other social savings, and when savings related to health

Summary

Treatment is effective for opioid addiction. But we must educate ourselves, employees, managers and employers about this problem, and we need expanded prevention, education and monitoring efforts in and outside the workplace. ■

*Pablo McCabe is regional development director and Jeff Mangrum is central region business development director for Hazelden Foundation, the national nonprofit organization that helps employees sustain lifelong recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. For more information about Hazelden, visit www.hazelden.org. **Editor's note:** For more on SBIRT, see article elsewhere in this newsletter and this month's *Brown Bagger* insert.*

Managing Poor Performers is a Big Problem

Managers spend nearly one full day a week managing poor performers, a recent Robert Half International survey suggests. Chief financial officers (CFOs) recently surveyed by Robert Half International said that, on average, supervisors spend **17%** of their time – nearly one day per week – overseeing poorly performing employees.

“Bad hires are costly, not just for the drain they place on the budget but also in terms of lost morale, productivity and time,” said Max Messmer, chairman and CEO of Robert Half International and author of *Motivating Employees For Dummies*® (John Wiley and Sons, Inc.).

Part of the solution, according to Robert Half, is for hiring managers to not make poor hiring decisions in the first place. Robert Half identified five do’s and don’ts when hiring:

Don’t	Do
1. Go it alone.	Tap colleagues for their thoughts on needed attributes and competencies for the open role, and work with a specialized recruiting firm to find the best candidates.
2. Think the Internet has all the answers.	Cultivate a talent pipeline by personally reaching out to your network and recruiting sources. Online tools can be valuable, but personal interaction is the most important aspect of the hiring process.
3. Take too long.	Extend an offer once you identify your top candidate. Companies that don’t move quickly risk losing good people to other opportunities.
4. Offer a low salary.	Offer a compensation package that, at a minimum, meets the market standard. Stay current on prevailing trends by reviewing resources such as the 2013 Salary Guides from Robert Half.
5. Fail to differentiate between must-have and nice-to-have candidate attributes.	Identify the skills that are mandatory and those that can be developed. The goal is to hire the person who is the best match for the job and your work environment. ■

Resources

Document, Document, Document: What Every Manager Needs to Know About Tracking Performance and Problems, \$99, PDF download, PBP Executive Reports, (800) 220-5000, www.pbpxexecutivereports.com. This report explains why good documentation is essential to avoiding costly, disruptive lawsuits. ■

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EAPA Endorses SBIRT Screening

The Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) has endorsed the Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) process as a standard practice for all EAP clients. The method includes screening for risky alcohol or drug use with evidence-based screening questions, followed by brief intervention and, when appropriate, referral to treatment and follow-up.

SBIRT screening uses a brief (five minutes or less) but scientifically valid questionnaire, such as the AUDIT-C or AUDIT, to identify whether drinking or drug use

could be placing a client at risk for negative consequences. Depending on the results from the questions, the EA professional may provide education, advice, motivational interviewing, help with an action plan and/or referral for treatment.

The process also includes appropriate support and follow-up as indicated by individual circumstances. Use of the SBIRT process has been demonstrated to improve the identification, successful rehabilitation, and productivity of people whose drinking or drug use is becoming problematic.

To assist EA professionals and EA network providers in imple-

menting SBIRT, EAPA and other organizations have collaborated to produce a free online core training.

Log in to <http://www.eapassn.org/ondemand>. EAPA members already have an account. Use your EAPA member number as your username and your last name as your password. For example, username: EAPA_00999 and password: Smith. Non-EAPA members need to create an account, and then login. (**Editor's note:** See this month's *Brown Bagger* for more information on SBIRT.) ■

Source: EAPA.

On the Job

Caregiving with a Twist: Resources for Men

Did you know that 45% of “working caregivers” are men? That’s the term experts use for people who care for an elderly family member – like a parent – while also holding down a job.

In the past, women traditionally filled that role since they typically cared for the entire family. But today, that role is increasingly falling on male shoulders. And experts are finding that men are less likely than women to ask for help in caring for their family, mainly because men often don’t know that help exists!

That’s a problem, because research shows that the average

working caregiver loses about \$90,000 in wages, over their lifetime – due to all the extra time off they need to be with their family. That may be why guys act more like “care coordinators” – meaning, they’re more likely to hire someone else to provide the care.

And finding the right help can be time-consuming and stressful. That’s why a growing number of caregiving services are popping up, targeted specifically at men. Here are a few:

MaleCaregiverCommunity.com – This is basically an online support group related to caregiving. Recent topics include: “The

Stress of Caring for Mom,” and “Why is Dad So Stubborn?”

CareManager.org – This is an online directory set up to help users connect with social workers or registered nurses. These professionals can help users assess a loved one’s needs and arrange for in-home care.

BenefitsCheckup.org – This is a free service that helps identify the programs that loved ones qualify for, which helps pay for things such as prescription drugs, meals, and others. ■

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

Would YOU Have an Office Romance?

Have you ever fallen for a co-worker? It's fairly common; after all, you spend 40-plus hours a week with them. According to a recent survey by Career Builder, 4 out of 10 people have dated a coworker at some point, and a majority of them ended up getting married.

But having a workplace romance can get you into real trouble, especially a boss-underling relationship, because it can quickly turn into a sexual harassment lawsuit – with the lower-level employee claiming they were afraid they'd be fired if they didn't date the boss.

If you find yourself headed toward a supervisor-employee relationship, employment attorney Kathleen McKenna recommends you both sign a "cupid contract" which spells out in writing that the relationship is consensual. Set a few ground rules in case the relationship ends, kind of like an office romance pre-nup, like, which of you will leave the department, or the com-



pany, if the relationship flames out, or if management decides you should no longer work together.

Think long and hard about what it would be like to lose your job, because in most failed office romances, one person ends up leaving, voluntarily or not.

Office Romances Fading

According to a recent survey in *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 25% fewer employees say they've had a workplace romance. Why the change? Because most employees now believe that workplace relationships are a distraction that hurts

job performance, and more companies are banning them because they're worried about the rising number of employee lawsuits.

A lot of employees end up suing for a "hostile work environment" after their relationship crashes and burns, and creates a tense, angry atmosphere that affects their work. Even co-workers NOT involved in the relationship are suing companies because the employees who *are* in the relationship make the workplace hostile for everybody.

On the flip side, some management experts say that office romances can be good for a company. Studies show that co-worker couples spend more time at work, take fewer sick days, and are less likely to quit. In fact, some companies even encourage in-house matchmaking, including National Public Radio, Pixar Animation, Southwest Airlines, and the Princeton Review. ■

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

Quick Ideas

Tips to Improve Communication

Remember the character in the movie *Cool Hand Luke*? "What we have here is ... failure to communicate."

It's true: effective communication – whether it's to resolve a conflict, share important information – or for any other reason, is crucial in any workplace.

But like anything else, it takes practice to build communication skills. The following are some tips for EA professionals

to share with their corporate clients:

- 1) Repeat what you *thought* you heard. You may have heard it wrong.
- 2) Provide examples of what you mean.
- 3) Speak clearly and distinctly.
- 4) Maintain a positive attitude.

People will be more interested in what you have to say, and are more likely to listen, when you display a positive attitude.

5) Listen actively. Put down your cell phone or BlackBerry and give the person your undivided attention. *Really* listening is the key in any type of communication (and relationship).

6) Share. Sharing ideas is a personal effort to relate to others.

7) Find a common ground. Start from something you both can agree on ... and go from there. But you have to *start* first. ■

Source: City of Milwaukee EAP.

CBT can Reduce Depression

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can reduce symptoms of depression in people who fail to respond to drug treatment, according to a study in the *Lancet*.

Up to two-thirds of people with depression do not respond to anti-depressants. However, CBT, a type of psychotherapy, was found to benefit nearly half of the 234 patients who received it, combined with normal care from their health care provider. CBT is a form of psychotherapy that helps people with depression change the way they think to improve how they feel and alter their behavior.

Dr. Nicola Wiles, from the Centre for Mental Health, Addiction and Suicide Research at

the University of Bristol, said: “While the addition of CBT was effective for patients who had not responded to anti-depressants, not everyone who received CBT got better. These patients had severe and chronic depression so it is unlikely that one treatment would be effective for everyone.”

“We need to invest in other research to find alternative treatments for patients whose symptoms have not responded to treatment with anti-depressants,” she added.

The patients who *did* benefit from cognitive behavioral therapy spent one hour a week with a clinical psychologist learning skills to help change the way they think.

Paul Farmer, chief executive at the mental health charity *Mind*,

agreed there is no “one size fits all” treatment for people with mental health problems.

“We welcome this research because it recognizes that patients should have the right to a wide range of treatment options based on individual needs,” he said. ■

Additional sources: BBC News and EAP NewsBrief, a service of EAPA.



Overcoming Work-related Phobias

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, an estimated 5.3 million Americans suffer from a social phobia, an overwhelming anxiety and self-consciousness in social settings.

A phobia can be considered a disability if it limits a major life activity, says Scott Barer, a labor and employment law attorney. “For example, if the phobia rises to the level of, or causes, a mental disorder that limits a major life activity, then the phobia should be considered a disability,” he says. “In that situation, the employee

has rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act and likely under similar state laws.”

Psychologist Elizabeth Lombardo shares three tips for EA professionals who count employees with social phobias among their clients:

❖ **Address the stress:** Phobias become stronger when overall stress levels are high. The individual needs to take steps to reduce stress, such as meditation, exercise or deep breathing.

❖ **Use distraction:** What an individual focuses on only gets

bigger, so, for instance, rather than focusing on a fear that the plane will crash, this person needs to distract himself/herself by having a few good movies and magazines available to keep one’s mind on something more pleasant.

❖ **Expose, don’t avoid:** Ironically, avoiding a fear only makes it stronger. A technique called systematic desensitization causes the individual to combine the fear with relaxation methods. As a result, people’s bodies will relax, or at least not be so tense, when they *are* exposed to their phobia. ■

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Free Internet Rein Deemed OK

Does access to non-work-related websites make for distracted employees? Many businesses aren't concerned, a new OfficeTeam survey suggests. Fifty-three percent of professionals interviewed said their company does not block social networking, shopping and entertainment sites. For those whose employers *do* restrict access, more than one in five (22%) employees admitted to frequently using their personal mobile devices as a way of working around the issue.

"Professionals should [still] be mindful of how they are spending their time while at the office. Surfing the Web might provide a nice break from work, but it should never get in the way of it,"



said Robert Hosking, executive director of OfficeTeam.

OfficeTeam advises employees to use good judgment when accessing the Internet for non-business purposes. Here are five tips:

1. **Get in the know.** Familiarize yourself with corporate web policies.
2. **Assume someone's watching.** Just because nobody's looking over your shoulder, doesn't mean that

online activity isn't being tracked. Avoid spending excessive time on the Web for personal matters.

3. **Don't overshare.** Resist the urge to forward those cute kitten videos or other irrelevant Internet "gems" to co-workers, and *never* send objectionable content.

4. **Think outside the boxes.** Lots of deliveries at the office could make a manager question whether those bargains are being bagged on company time.

5. **Keep an eye out.** Be wary of suspicious emails or downloads that may cause viruses or other security concerns. Alert your information technology team if anything looks amiss. ■

Source: OfficeTeam (www.officeteam.com).

Avoiding Workplace Meltdowns

A new year is upon us, but one thing isn't likely to change: busy professionals continuing to face the challenge of juggling meetings and projects at work with family time. This can lead to rising stress levels. In fact, in a new Accountemps survey, 41% of CFOs cited trying to balance work and personal demands as the greatest source of workplace stress for professionals.

"Whether it's through flexible work schedules, telecommuting arrangements or other options, organizations that commit to these efforts enhance morale and productivity and make their businesses more appealing places to work," said Max Messmer, chairman of Accountemps.

Messmer added that workers need to do their part, too. Accountemps *highlights some areas that employee assistance professionals should share with employees:*

❖ **Understand the employer's priorities:** Knowing which initiatives are most critical to the firm's success will help prioritize responsibilities. Proper workload management will increase productivity and make it easier to accommodate personal demands as they arise.

❖ **Know what the company offers:** Familiarize yourself with alternate work arrangements or other benefits the employer may provide.

For example, can employees telecommute or adopt a more flexible schedule? When approaching a manager about adding these offerings, present a business case that also details how the firm will benefit from giving employees more flexibility in when and how work gets done.

❖ **Learn to say NO:** Realize that no one can accomplish everything. If an employee can't take on a new project, he/she should let the manager know. The individual should explain the situation, and, if needed, offer to shift some responsibilities to accommodate the new request. The boss would rather know up front than see a project fall through the cracks. ■