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## Internet and Telephonic Delivery of Employee Assistance Services: A Position Paper from the EAPA Professional Practices Committee

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**Internet and Telephonic Delivery of Employee Assistance Services:  
A Position Paper from the EAPA Professional Practices Committee**

WHITE PAPER

September 22, 2003

EAPA Professional Practice Committee:

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### **Need for a Position from EAPA:**

- EAPs historically have emphasized an in-person model for contact between the EA professional and employee client. However, EAP models using telephonic models have been in use for more than 10 years and are used to some extent by many EAPs today. The most recent channel of delivery available to EAP providers is the Internet. Both of these technologies have received only limited formal examination from relevant professional associations and researchers.
- The 2001 EAPA Work/Life Committee survey of over 1000 members of EAP/work/life professional associations found that 78% of respondents said that they offered Internet information and resources and 22% offered Internet counseling services. Results from the 2002 EAPA Work/Life survey of over 200 EAP and work/life vendors, found that the format for services delivered in the past year was 81% in-person, 15% telephonic and 3% internet, averaged across all providers. These surveys indicate that phone is used by some EAPs and that Internet is already a part of many EAPs for informational services and is also offered by a few providers for clinical counseling type services as well.
- There are external pressures on EAPs to reduce the cost to customers. It is necessary for EAPs to be financially responsible and to provide quality and effective EAP services without allowing cost reduction measures to compromise the integrity of an EAP. Internet and telephonic technology can offer some cost-effective delivery channels for certain types of EAP services, particularly informational and educational services (e.g., program information and outreach materials; self-assessment tools, links to other sites; etc.) and timely access into the program.
- There are elements of the EAP “Core Technology” and the accompanying standards that are of such a sensitive and interactive nature that ensure the integrity of the process while keeping the EAP’s and organization’s liability to a minimum (e.g., management consultations regarding performance difficulties of employees; the assessment of “employees at-risk”). The

### **Opportunities from Internet and Telephonic Technology:**

- Web-based and telephonic services may be a new point of entry to the EAP for many employees. Offering EAP services through these formats can help meet the needs of a changing workforce that may prefer technologically based channels of access to services.-
- Web-based and telephonic services offer flexible and cost-effective methods for offering services to employee populations in multiple and diverse geographic locations.
- Web-based and telephonic technologies offer immediate and 24 hour-a-day access to the EAP.
- Web-based and telephonic technologies offer mechanisms for greater integration with other employee services.
- Web-based and telephonic technologies may offer the opportunity for enhancing the practice efficiency and effectiveness of clinical and consultative EAP services.

### **Concerns from Internet and Telephonic Technology:**

- EAPA established acceptable standards of clinical and ethical practice for EAPs to follow. Although developed primarily for face-to-face delivery of services between counselor and client, these same standards for practice need to be applied to the nature of the clinical services delivered through telephonic and web-based technology. In fact, The standards may need to be revisited and, if necessary, revised to reflect the integration of these new technologies in the domain of EA practice and to provide the guidelines for their effective use.
- Live in-person communication is most preferable for EAP clinical and consultation services. At this time, exclusively web-based EAP services include only some aspects of the EAP Core Technology and the services considered appropriate for clinical contact.
- Employers should be cautious in purchasing EAP services and seek to ensure that regardless of the delivery format (in-person, phone or Internet), that their EAP meets requirements for applicable federal and state confidentiality and record-keeping practices; Drug-free workplace regulations; HIPPA data privacy compliance issues; union contracts; corporate “reporting” and investigative requirements of compliance related infractions or incidents (i.e. sexual harassment; employee discrimination); lack of privacy of online and e-mail exchanges under the e-mail policies of many organizations.
- Are EAP services for clinical issues and management consultations that are provided over telephone or over the Internet of the same level of effectiveness and quality compared to the traditional in-person delivery format? This issue is largely untested in the EAP field. Only a few research studies have been conducted on telephonic EAP delivery and almost no research has been done on web-based EAP services. Thus, before any conclusions or recommendations can be made, more research is needed that scientifically examines the performance of telephonic and web-based delivery formats.

### **Summary**

This White Paper Committee concludes:

Telephone and Internet formats for service delivery are becoming more common in our industry. With this change brings both the opportunity for greater access, speed and efficiency for EAP service delivery, but also the concerns for clinical appropriateness and ethical/privacy issues for services delivered exclusively over the Internet or telephone.

On-line only service models do not appear to meet the Core Technology standards for EAP practice. How the Employee Assistance Professionals Association’s existing standards, ethical guidelines, and other relevant professional practices apply to technological advancements in service delivery need to be explored.

EAPA encourages commentary on this position from the professional community, and it also wishes to develop new research opportunities to examine the prevalence and effectiveness of EAP services delivered by telephone and by the Internet.

## Appendix

From 2001 EAPA Work/Life Committee Survey of EAP and Work/Life Professionals (N = 1,190 Individuals)

### **Q.7p Internet Information and Resources - internet page with information, resources and referral**

<u>Choice</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Percentage Answered</u>
EAP	503	57.4%
Work/Life	230	26.2%
Other	265	30.2%
Not Provided	192	21.9%

### **Q.7q Internet Counseling Services - internet page with access to on-line counseling for client use**

<u>Choice</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Percentage Answered</u>
EAP	136	15.7%
Work/Life	67	7.8%
Other	32	3.7%
Not Provided	673	77.9%

From 2002 EAPA Work/Life Committee Pilot Survey of EAP and Work/Life Vendors.

N = 213 vendors:

### **9. In general what percentage of your services are delivered in the following formats?**

Face to Face Sessions	81.48%
Telephonic Services	15.25%
Web related services	2.39%