

# Appendix B

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## HOW AN EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP) CAN HELP

By Dr. Dale A. Masi

Originally started as occupational alcoholism programs, EAPs have broadened to become professional counseling services for employees with a variety of emotional as well as addiction problems. Many organizations now have EAPs, either in-house or as a contracted service. Many are staffed with professionally trained mental health persons such as psychologists and social workers.

A company's EAP can become a calming voice amid reactions and over-reactions to AIDS-related incidents. The EAP can serve as a valuable resource in developing an AIDS policy, and it can help allay employee anxieties and fears as the company develops its philosophy and policy. An EAP is in a unique position to offer this kind of support, for several reasons.

Mental health professionals, especially social workers, have traditionally worked in hospitals where they have been the support for terminally ill persons, an experience that makes them particularly well-suited to work with AIDS patients and their families. Their professional objectivity enables them to operate as an advocate for the AIDS patient while maintaining a perspective that allows them to remain sensitive to the anxieties of co-workers. EAP personnel will need to focus their efforts in two directions: Providing appropriate support and referral services for the AIDS patient as well as support and educational information for co-workers who find themselves working closely with a person who has AIDS.

EAP personnel have been trained to work with community resources and are knowledgeable regarding those services. They will be able to

assist in making contact with appropriate community programs. Employees who are AIDS victims or family members of AIDS victims will need such support services to face the terminal illness, to make appropriate plans, and to achieve adequate medical care. Counseling from the EAP will give them the help they need to deal with other employees, supervisors, and the workplace in general. Family members as well as persons with AIDS will experience denial, upset, bewilderment, even shame, and they will need assistance as they face their own loss and try to cope with helping their loved ones.

The EAP can also help companies in the interpretation and implementation of legislation pertinent to persons with AIDS. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which declared persons with certain illnesses to be handicapped may be extended specifically to apply to AIDS patients. The EAP staff is already familiar with this law as it pertains to victims of other handicapping conditions, and will be an invaluable aid in understanding its ramifications for employees who have AIDS, as issues concerning their disability benefits and termination on medical grounds become apparent.

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*Dr. Dale Masi is an international authority on Employee Assistance Programs and author of the book, *Designing Employee Assistance Programs*, published by AMACOM in 1984. She is a professor at the University of Maryland and president of Masi Research Consultants, Inc., which specializes in designing and evaluating EAPs.*

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Note: Dr. Masi will lead a one-day AMA Briefing, *Setting Corporate Policy for Cocaine, AIDS, and Social Diseases*, on January 28, 1986. She also leads the two-day Seminar, *Designing an Employee Assistance Program*. For more information, call Mel Lyons at (212) 586-8100.