

INSIGHT INTO THE WORLD OF EAP / EFAP Knowledge is Power for Affiliate Counsellors

Like with business, globalization is changing the EAP world. Given our current economic crisis, the changes continue often with more abruptness than anticipation. EAPs like other businesses are looking for a variety of ways to stay competitive and viable.

Employee Assistance Programs are work-based programs in place to benefit both the employer and the employee. Mostly, the focus is to help employees deal with any work or personal issue(s) that is troubling them and that may be impacting their job performance. Many of the EAP providers delivering the EAP services utilize both salary and affiliate (contract) counsellors.

In the last five-to-ten years, we have seen big name EAPs close and others merge. There are more EAPs operating in Canada now with headquarters in the United States or elsewhere, such as PPC of the United Kingdom who has recently acquired BC-based Interlock.

EAPs have entered the world of technology offering more telephonic and cyber-counselling sessions. Many EAPs have outsourced their 24 hour line to call centers and many have contracts to wellness internet programs in order to expand their range of services. Paper work has seemed more time consuming with some EAPs and not too bad with others. Sadly, we have seen EAPs deviate from the field's core competencies. We have been aware that some EAPs contract with counsellors who lack the EAP knowledge and skill-set. And, yes there are some EAPs who are focusing on winning contracts based on the lowest value thus devaluing the services or underscoring EAP as more of a commodity. OUCH !!!

On the bright side, the field of EAP is evolving, exciting and forces those of us who operate in this field to keep up-to-date with business and world events. EAPA (The Employee Assistance Professional Association) supports and addresses the professional development of the EA clinical professionals.

There are EAP company providers who function with quality professionalism. We are seeing the emergence of boutique EAPs i.e. those who focus on best practices and controlled growth while their skilled professionals work within the core competencies.

As mentioned, most EAPs use both salaried and affiliate counsellors. Minimum fees for affiliate counsellors have not increased in the last 15 years and have actually decreased with some EAPs. Some EAPs offer low rates because counsellors are willing to accept very low rates. Anyone who is accepting less than \$ 60.00 per hour is not only minimizing his/her own professionalism but minimizing the counselling profession as a whole. How can a counsellor's overhead and income be justified on less than \$60.00 per hour ? Please do the math as you consider: office rent, technology, electricity, insurance,

parking, income etc. It is imperative to act from a position of confidence when negotiating fees. Resentment will eventually set in (and then ooze out) if a counsellor is unhappy with his/her fee structure. Remember, an EAP referral is one feed into your practice only.

Counsellors with knowledge of EAP and its core competencies are in a much better position to sift through the better paying EAPs from the ones who are not paying well. And, EAPs who recognize that counsellors have the EAP skill-set will be more likely to send them more referrals at higher fees. EAPs are in the business to make money as well as to make a difference to the clients that they serve. It is not a perfect world, so of course there are EAPs who will cut corners, price a contract too low or not adhere to high standards. Therefore, it is important for counsellors to be knowledgeable and confident in the work that they do to make sure that they are working for the EA providers who are treating them with professionalism and paying them fairly.

Claire Sutton, M.A., RCC, CEAP

Claire Sutton is a Certified Employee Assistance Professional; a specialist in human behaviour in the workplace; and, the EAP advisor to the BCACC.

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