

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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supporting EAP professionals

Project Unveils Top Ten Behavioral Apps

Third in a Series on Technology & EAP

By Kathleen Greer

Last spring, KGA undertook a project to identify the current “Best 10 Behavioral Health Apps for 2014.” The purpose of the project was two-fold: 1) to equip EAP counselors with a variety of high-quality apps that could serve as an adjunct to counseling sessions and referrals for therapy; and 2) To draw attention to quality apps in the marketplace.

Why Project was Necessary

With the U.S. workforce now made up of 36% Millennials and 16% GenXers, these “digital natives” see apps as a viable mechanism for self-help. According to the analytics company Flurry, “Overall app use in 2013 posted 115% year-over-year growth,” with each app category increasing.

As times are changing, some of the most essential ways to communicate and benefit clients are through technology, such as mobile applications. Employee and family member access to health information is rapidly changing:

- 19% of adult smartphone users have a health app;
- 72% of U.S. adults have looked online for health information in the past year; and
- Eight out of 10 health inquiries start at web search engines.

Starting a Proactive Health Campaign

As a “high-touch” employee assistance program, KGA wanted to reach out to covered lives through a proactive health promo-

tion program. We also wanted to be sure that counselors were recommending quality downloads. With the help of the entire staff, KGA set out to evaluate 250 current behavioral health apps by applying the following criteria.

- Topics (i.e. anxiety, depression, stress, and sleep/relaxation);

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- Clinical effectiveness;
 - History of updates and any necessary “bug fixes”;
 - Price;
 - Customer ratings;
 - Customer reviews;
 - Popularity (amount of downloads); and
 - Availability (Android, Apple, or both).
- PowerPoint slides were created for various presentations.
 - Videos were produced that introduced and highlighted the functionality of the apps.
 - A social media campaign was launched on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.
 - Each app developer was contacted as the apps were launched.

Narrowing the List

The list was shortened to 35 apps that clients could use in addition to the counseling they may have already been receiving. The reviews helped to narrow the search, as they provided testimonials on the efficacy of the apps, especially for severe stress, anxiety, and sleep deprivation.

The KGA counseling staff tried these apps on their own and then gave their feedback and ratings. As the counselors are the ones providing assistance to employees every day, their extensive knowledge of conditions and methods of support and improvement was crucial to finding the most constructive apps for behavioral health.

The apps were each tested by trusted staff to confirm their reliability, simplicity, and efficiency, as well as the overall aesthetics. Counselors were asked to comment on what type of client might benefit from the particular app they tested.

Marketing the Project

The next challenge was to introduce the health app promotion to our EAP customers; both HR and benefits contacts and the employees and family members. The marketing program included the following activities:

- A letter was sent out to clients to introduce the project.
- A wallet card was produced for health fairs that identified the apps.

Results

Facebook likes for KGA tripled in the first three weeks of the promotion and the apps were introduced around the country at several conferences such as the National Behavioral Consortium, EAPA, and New England Employee Benefits Council (NEEBC).

As of February 2015, roughly 10% of KGA’s client organizations forwarded the e-newsletter about the Top Ten Apps directly to their workforce, resulting in 11,646 opens. More often, clients placed a link to the newsletter on their intranet. One health care system employing 4,039 employees widely distributed the promotion, resulting in 5,298 opens.

The Top 10 Behavioral Health Apps were ...

❖ **Optimism** – Track your mood, behavior, triggers, and coping strategies to find out what works best for you over time and how to remain positive through difficult situations. Try out this *emotional well-being* app on iOS (version 4.3 or newer) for **free**.

❖ **MindShift** – This **free mental wellness** app is available for both iOS (version 5.0 or newer) and Android. It gives users the opportunity to learn about anxiety,

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panic and how they can control it. The inspirational quotes may help someone who is trying to think more positively.

❖ **SnoreLab** – This app keeps a record of snoring, as well as any lapses of breathing, which could even indicate sleep apnea. For an employee who contacts the EAP because of insomnia, this *sleep management* app can be used

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during the counseling session. It can be found for iOS (version 6.0 or newer) for **\$1.99**.

❖ **What's My M3** – This **free mental wellness** app (iOS version 7.0 or newer and Android) allows the user to administer a self-test of symptoms of disorders such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and OCD. It is ideal for someone who is reluctant to ask for help, but responds to self-assessments.

❖ **Tactical Breather** – Relax at a moment's notice with simple breathing exercises led by a soothing male or female voice. This **mental wellness** app is available for both iOS (version 4.3 or newer) and Android for **free**. This app takes the stress out of teaching relaxation because it provides instant access to a variety of exercises.

❖ **My Fitness Pal** – Track your weight through this easy-to-use and supportive **weight management** app found on both iOS (version 6.0 or newer) and Android for **free**. My Fitness Pal helps to motivate an individual who is having difficulty building fitness into their daily routine by suggesting simple, behavioral techniques such as a “squat challenge” or healthy recipe.

❖ **Quit Smoking with Andrew Johnson** – This **mental wellness** app, for both iOS (version 7.0 or newer) and Android for **\$2.99**, is for anyone committed to kicking this bad habit to the curb in 2015. For individuals struggling with nicotine addiction, this app augments counseling.

❖ **Mind Tools** – Build over 100 personal and business skills in your free time through an assortment of topics, including team management and stress management.



Editor's Notebook

In this series on technology and EAP, we've examined video counseling, social networking, and this month we will address *behavioral health apps*. Which of these platforms is YOUR EAP using? One? More than one? Something else? None?

Certainly, it is up to the individual EAP to pursue the platform(s) that is the best fit for their specific services and customers. Mobile apps are one strong possibility. As Kathleen Greer, author of this month's cover story states, “With the U.S. workforce now made up of 36% Millennials and 16% GenXers, these ‘digital natives’ see apps as a viable mechanism for self-help.”

However, referrals to *existing* apps – such as the ones Kathleen discusses in her article – may be

sufficient for many EAPs. As Seth Moeller explains in a sidebar, just because an EAP *can develop* an app, doesn't necessarily mean that it *should!* Seth asks EAP practitioners to ask themselves some important questions first before “diving in.”

The crux of the issue is this: While the EAP needs to strategize which aspect(s) of technology would offer the most “bang for the buck” it seems clear they must either embark on new technology, or, for the already tech-savvy, improve upon the services they *already* offer. The alternative is appearing irrelevant to Millennials and GenXers.

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This *management* app is available for both iOS (version 5.1 or newer) and Android for **free**. For an employee who has been referred to the EAP because of specific work challenges, Mind Tools offers convenient, specific development activities.

❖ **Get Some Headspace** – This **free mental wellness** app offers ten sessions of 10-minute meditation that concentrates on breathing and focusing strategies given through calming audios. This app is ideal for a client who doesn't have the time or money to join a 10-week class, but wants to begin a meditation program.

❖ **Recovery Record: Eating Disorder Management** – Track and control an *eating disorder* by

logging all of your meals, snacks, thoughts, and feelings throughout the day. As an adjunct to eating disorder treatment, Recovery Record can take the place of journaling and worksheets. Download for either iOS (version 4.3 or newer) or Android for **free**.

Summary

The apps were well received by clients as a creative approach to health promotion. One HR client said, “This is a fabulous way to reach our younger population,” while another stated, “There are so many apps, I never knew where to start.” ■

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