

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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The Challenges of Aging Parents

EAPs need to be More Proactive

By Barry D. Epstein, J.D.

Our aging parents face enormous challenges struggling to navigate the complicated health care maze. Their adult children, many in their prime working years, share this struggle regardless of whether they are actually caregivers. The stress, distractions, and demands of helping an aging parent frequently undermine both personal health and job performance. Both employees and employers are important stakeholders in the care of our elders.

Early interventions, particularly planning services, are preferable to “emergencies”, which arise largely because families do

not adequately discuss and plan for issues related to aging. As the American population ages, EA professionals have an opportunity to advocate *proactive* planning as opposed to simply providing interventions when needed.

Questions to Think About

In other words, the challenges of aging parents are inviting *early* EAP intervention. More specifically:

- What should be the role of EAPs as the need for proactive planning increases?
- How can EAPs and their clients help increase job performance and return on investment while workers struggle in coping with aging parents?

Unique Aspects of Elderly Caregiving

Renowned aging theorist Ken Dychtwald has studied the effects of the aging population and found that the “vast majority of families have not had a comprehensive discussion regarding long-term care.” From my experience, I know this is still the situation today. His study includes findings that EAPs need to consider:

- Most elders prefer and are receiving long-term care *at home*;
- The vast majority (80%) of home care is provided by *unpaid* caregivers;
- Families significantly underestimate the *financial* and *emotional* demands of caregiving; and

continued on Page 2



FEATURED INSIDE

- ▶ EAP Smoking Cessation Program Works in China
- ▶ Alzheimer's Toll Impacting Workplace
- ▶ Addressing Workplace Bullies
- ▶ How Veterans-friendly is YOUR EAP?
- ▶ Lifestyle Tips Recap
- ▶ Should Digital Records Include Mental Health?
- ▶ EAPA Updates Bibliography
- ▶ Volunteer – but do it Right!
- ▶ Work toward SMART Solutions

INSERTS

- ▶ *Brown Bagger*: The Feeling Owed Syndrome...
- ▶ *Payroll Stuffers*
- ▶ *LifestyleTIPS*®

- Even though two-thirds of the population will require care-giving assistance, a minority (35%) of those surveyed believed they would.

Strategic Partnership

Morgan Stanley announced a strategic partnership with a medical case management firm due to the fact that their brokers do not have the expertise to properly handle key elder care issues. A number of major banks and trust companies are now offering “holistic” strategies that include elder care referrals.

In addition, many long-term care providers have created call centers to respond to families struggling with elder care challenges. *The “takeaway” is that if EA professionals do not assume a leadership role in addressing these challenges, another industry will.*

Proactive Interventions Lead to Reduced Costs

Proactive interventions and provider collaboration in senior care solutions can offer significant cost-saving opportunities for families and employers alike. However, waiting to discuss care options and preferences until a parent falls or is diagnosed with a terminal disease triggers emergency-based decisions that end up being less effective and more expensive.

This is also a result of the myth that remaining in one’s home is always senior’s best option. This misconception fosters “volunteer” spousal and/or family caregiving without adequate, objective evaluation. My own family made this mistake as my mother’s health declined due to the ravages of Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s.

Which Specific Solutions?

A survey of EAP websites reveals an industry dilemma about

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Elder Care resources include...

Aging Parents and Elder Care

<http://www.aging-parents-and-elder-care.com/>

Everything you need in one place: elder care articles, advice, caregiving tools, support group, and more.

Alzheimer’s Workplace Alliance

<http://www.actionalz.org/AWACHampions/toolkit.asp>

The Alzheimer’s Workplace Alliance (AWA), affiliated with the Alzheimer’s Association, provides companies and organizations with complimentary resources for their employees and customers.

Elder Care Locator

www.eldercare.gov

Local information, referral resources, and contact information for state and local agencies, from the United States’ Health and Human Services Department.

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

www.n4a.org

A goal of this organization is to ensure that resources and support services are available to older Americans.

Savvy Aging

www.savvyaging.com

Whether it’s consulting, referrals, facilitation, referrals, or collaboration, this site is a helpful guide through the aging maze.

which specific solutions for elder care issues should be offered. The minimal end of the spectrum, such as a senior resource list, is tempting given elder complexities, but it also may represent lost opportunities for more impactful interventions with a better return on investment (ROI).

Without qualitative assessments, resource lists and a myriad of websites often leave families intimidated and confused. Alternatively,

continued on Page 3

full-service offerings raise equally compelling issues for companies:

- What are the provider screening criteria?
- Who created it and what is their level of expertise?
- What are or should be the credentials of the “specialists” who assist the employee?
- What ethical dilemmas arise when the referring EA professional faces conflicts between the interests of the employee, employee’s parents, and the employer?

If an employee is preoccupied with the care of an ailing parent, a certain degree of absenteeism and presenteeism is predictable. This can strain performance and the employer/employee relationship. *EAPs can assume a leadership role by working side-by-side with managers to jointly solve this problem.*

I believe the [overall] solution is both simple and complex at the same time... that is, raise employee awareness through EAP-driven initiatives with corresponding “permission” by employers to seek assistance free of stigma before workplace performance suffers.

Best Practices

The following are among best practices for EAPs to consider implementing:

- ❖ Include elder care and planning as an employee wellness or work/life balance issue within an EAP’s influence. This is an area where employers should want high utilization rates.
- ❖ Adopt proactive educational programs and interventions for employers and employees beyond traditional referrals. (Savvy Aging is among the organizations that offers a facilitation process to



Editor’s Notebook

The phone rings: It’s your sister, who tells you: “*Mom is in the hospital. I don’t know a lot yet, but the doctor says it’s her gall bladder. He says it’s serious.*”

Imagine trying to get back to work after receiving a message like that, and how that would conflict with your urge to leave workplace duties to be with your mom in the hospital.

This example only scratches the surface of the issues faced by employee caregivers – those of us who are trying to juggle the many demands of working full time, and then “overtime” to care for elderly parents.

As the population in the U.S. ages, EAPs are in a perfect position to help struggling employees. However, as Barry Epstein explains in this issue’s cover story, the problem is best addressed in a *proactive* rather than a reactive

matter. How will EAPs respond to this challenge?

This month’s *Brown Bagger* takes a look at an overlooked elder care topic, the “Feeling Owed Syndrome.” Since we love our aging parents, the idea of “feeling owed” might seem a bit odd at first. But think about it, while most of us are happy to chip in and help when our aging parents need assistance, the fact is the strong emotions that come with it can fester over time... “*I love Mom, but I can’t keep putting her ahead of my work or I might get fired!*” These hidden, often unspoken feelings, need to be addressed, and this month’s insert does just that.

Mike Jacquart

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identify issues and help create an action plan.)

❖ Evaluate services with equal attention to quality management and ROI by outside program assessment and future specific utilization tracking.

❖ Include a holistic approach to the aging maze by partnering with health insurance carriers, clients and providers to increase both program effectiveness and ROI. Employee follow-ups to gauge participation and their perception of referral value is important.

Summary

Preventative resources are already standard practice in many areas, and aging is no different. It’s true that decline of a loved one’s health, disease, dementia and

family dysfunction are topics we understandably try to avoid.

However, as in most areas of business and life itself, I’ve found that reflection, discussion and planning eases the journey. To provide the greatest value to your employer and employee clients I urge readers to explore and implement novel ways to promote proactive elder care solutions. ■

Barry D. Epstein is the president of Savvy Aging (www.savvyaging.com). He is a nationally recognized long-term health care attorney, educator and mediator. He has served on Colorado’s Assisted Living Advisory Council, the Legal Advisory Committee of the Assisted Living Federation of America (ALFA) and is past president of the Alzheimer’s Association-Rocky Mountain Chapter. Editor’s note: A longer version of this article appeared in the 4th quarter 2014 issue of the Journal of Employee Assistance and is reprinted with permission.

EAP Smoking Cessation Program Works in China

Chestnut Global Partners (CGP), a provider of culturally-aware employee assistance and wellness programs to companies worldwide, recently announced a study demonstrating the positive results of an evidence-based smoking cessation program it implemented in China in partnership with Cease Smoking Today (CS2day). CS2day is an education initiative designed to provide physicians and health care professionals with effective and clinically relevant strategies to increase smoking cessation.

The study showed that, after a 90-day follow-up, those who completed the program were more likely to remain abstinent, or stop smoking daily and have lower levels of nicotine dependence than those who had dropped out. The objective of the study was to adapt an evidence-based smoking cessation intervention in China, the world's largest population of smokers.

According to the World Health Organization, China has more than 300 million smokers and consumes a third of the world's cigarettes. Despite government efforts, there has been almost no reduction in the male smoking rate from 2002 to 2010. Even the recent ban on public smoking has had little effect, given how culturally ingrained the habit has become and the wavering of Chinese authorities who have come to rely on tax revenues generated by cigarette sales.



CGP's program consisted of recommending medication and psychological counseling to employees seeking EAP services who were also screened for smoking. EAP (mental health) counselors based in CGP's Beijing office received training on the CS2day program, whose input was instrumental in adapting and delivering the intervention to Chinese employee clients.

An empirical program evaluation examined the intervention's effectiveness in helping clients quit or reduce the amount of smoking and nicotine dependence. *This is the first known smoking cessation program in China that was embedded within an EAP offering to Chinese employers and their employees.*

"The study showed that intervention programs that have been proven effective in the U.S. and placed in a Chinese cultural and workplace context, will increase awareness of the health implications of smoking, and steadily promote cessation, across all segments of Chinese society," said Chris Larrison, project manager for CS2day. ■

The study was supported by an educational grant from Pfizer, Inc. A summary of methodology and findings can be found at: chestnutglobalpartners.org/publications.

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Alzheimer's Toll Impacting Workplace

Companies increasingly employ workers who face the pressure of caring for elderly parents with Alzheimer's, some of whom have the added burden of simultaneously caring for their young children. These employees bring this stress to their workplace, which can affect productivity and morale.

More than 15.5 million caregivers in the U.S. are supporting people with Alzheimer's and other dementias, and nearly half of those caregivers are employed full or part time. Fifty-four percent of them reported having to go in late, leave work early or take time off due to the strain of caregiving. At a time when employers are in need

of skilled and dedicated workers, a loved one's Alzheimer's condition is driving many of them from the workplace.

This problem is going to get worse. The number of Americans with Alzheimer's and their caregivers will escalate rapidly in coming years. As Baby Boomers age, the disease is projected to affect as many as 16 million by 2050, barring the development of medical breakthroughs to prevent, slow or stop the disease.

What can employers do to handle this impact and help employees deal with these new burdens? *Raising awareness of the issue is an important first step. The EAP can play a vital role.*

Patience, care and work flexibility will also be important as employers navigate this challenge.

Another option is for companies to become a member of the Alzheimer's Workplace Alliance (AWA), which raises awareness of Alzheimer's and its symptoms. The organization also promotes the importance of early detection to employees.

Employers need to offer employee-caregivers information, education and work flexibility to help them manage the impact of this insidious and chronic disease. ■

Sources: Gretchen Cepek, general counsel of Allianz Life Insurance Co., Minneapolis Star Tribune.

On the Job

Addressing Workplace Bullies

Most offices have a bully: a person who is pushy and manipulative, and happy to terrorize and harass employees. These people are often quite dominant and socially skilled, and their main purpose is to bring others down in order to gain more status. According to Fast Company, 20% of employees experience bullying on a regular basis, and this is mostly based on reported cases. Other studies estimate that up to 50% of employees will experience bullying at some point of their careers.

Since many cases go unreported, the true incidence is arguably much higher than that. Workplace bullying has been

referred to as America's silent epidemic. Technology has armed bullies with a wide range of tools for operating behind the scenes.

Indeed, cyberbullying — bullying through digital means — is now a well-known phenomenon and it is rapidly catching up with physical forms of bullying.

Based on the independent research, there are four key recommendations organizations should consider:

1. Raise awareness, encourage reporting and whistleblowing:

these obvious HR processes have been found to minimize and even prevent bullying.

2. Name and shame: it does help to expose and punish bullies

in public. Mostly because it shows that senior leaders want a culture that truly condemns bullying.

3. Coach bullies: interventions aimed at inhibiting aggressive tendencies in aggressors can be highly effective.

4. Leverage technologies: since bullying is often manifested via digital means, companies can use text mining and email scraping tools to monitor and punish bullying. One clear "advantage" of cyberbullying — versus traditional forms of bullying — is that it always leaves digital records, so all one needs to do is retrieve the evidence from the server or cloud. ■

How Veterans-friendly is YOUR EAP?

An EAP can be an invaluable tool when addressing the needs of veterans in the workplace. Counseling can help manage mental health conditions or substance abuse, and an EA counselor can connect veterans to other resources that are available locally.

How veterans-friendly is YOUR employee assistance program? According to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs' *Veterans in the Workplace* study, a veterans-friendly EAP will exhibit the following characteristics:

- An intake, assessment and referral process in which confidentiality is emphasized.
- EA counselors trained in knowledge of military culture and who know how and when to assess for PTSD, risk of suicide, substance abuse, depression and anxiety.
- Counselors who recognize when to refer to another provider or connect the veteran with treatment resources.
- The ability to provide education on VA resources for veterans and their families.
- Management and supervisor consultation regarding military transition issues, appropriate responses to employees who exhibit behavioral issues, and how to encourage and destigmatize the use of EAP services by veteran employees.
- Training programs for employees, supervisors, managers and EAP providers. ■

*Additional source: Sally Hartman, EAP counselor with FEI Behavioral Health.
Editor's note: This article is condensed from the cover story that appeared in the November 2014 issue of EAR.*

Time Management

Lifestyle Tips Recap

Ever wonder when a certain article appeared? The way time flies, it's often further back than you think. To help jog your memory and track down that important article, the following is a list of cover stories that have appeared in the *Lifestyle Tips* insert in 2015. ■

Month	Topic	Title
October	Weight training	<i>So You Think You're Strong?</i>
September	Workplace success	<i>Tips for Getting Ahead at Work</i>
August	Fitness: fads versus reality	<i>What's Hot This Summer?</i>
July	Workplace success	<i>What You Need to Succeed</i>
June	Workplace fundamentals on connecting with Asian customers	<i>Succeeding in Asian Business Cultures</i>
May	Overcoming disability	<i>A Journey to Higher and Holier Places</i>
April	Role of technology in business communication	<i>Old-Fashioned Follow-up is Still Best</i>
March	Fitness motivation	<i>It's Time to Make a Stand</i>
February	Technology in the workplace	<i>Sloppy Emails Wreck Productivity</i>
January	Anger management	<i>Tips on Handling Tough Bosses</i>

Should Digital Records Include Mental Health?

The medical field has been notoriously slow to embrace technology when it comes to patients' health records.

The Affordable Care Act brought a \$30 billion cash infusion from the federal government that has helped move things along – now roughly 70% of medical files in the U.S. are digitized.

But this development has meant many new questions – among them, what to do with people's mental health records. Should they be part of the equation? Kept separately? As with many other aspects of this issue, different providers are following different paths.

When the Philadelphia VA went digital with its health records years ago, they decided to go all in – with combined mental and physical health info. Depression, addiction, diabetes, it's all there, for every physician and provider within the VA system to see.

David Oslin, psychiatrist and chief of behavioral health at the Philadelphia VA, says this approach is working well, and has resulted in better care. The medical records become part of Oslin's sessions with vets, and looks at them to assess the veteran's overall health.

Not all mental health providers are as excited about integrated records as Oslin. Others worry that patients with a mental health

diagnosis will be treated differently by other providers, and feel it's a violation of patients' privacy around sensitive issues.

For the most part, medical records don't "talk to each other" from system to system, so a doctor at one hospital can't see notes relating to treatment a patient has gotten at another facility. As a result, decisions tend to only affect patient care within one provider system.

Other health systems are cautious about including mental health records into patients' electronic files. At Einstein

Healthcare Network in Philadelphia, chief medical information officer Dr. Julie Massey is trying to get all of Einstein's providers and practices connected. So far, Einstein is opting for limited access, including diagnoses and medications available to all clinicians.

Many providers and consumers say it's time for mental health care to join the digital age. But the push for more integrated care will require a shift in healthcare that has yet to take root. ■

Source: *Newsweek's "The Pulse."*

In the News

EAPA Updates Bibliography

The Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) has published the 2015 update of its comprehensive *Annotated Bibliography of EAP Statistics and Research Articles*. The bibliography, which includes hundreds of EAP-related research articles published in the U.S. and other countries from 2000 through June 2015, is a unique EAPA members-only benefit.

Articles in the bibliography address EAP return-on-investment

studies, program effectiveness research, and other important topics. A brief summary of each article is included in the bibliography, along with the publication reference.

EA professionals, HR decision-makers, benefits brokers and others will find the bibliography to be a valuable resource in making evidence-based decisions affecting the future of individual programs and even the profession. ■

Source: *EAPA (www.eapassn.org).*

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Volunteer – but do it Right!

“If you want to feel good, volunteer,” says Lisa Sellman, owner of a pet care business and volunteer. “I realize that many of us are wrapped up with work and family, but I also know that if you do it right, volunteering can be a great stress reliever and source of joy in your life.”

The key, she says, is to let passion be your guide when you decide to volunteer. Sellman’s tips include:

❖ **Choose wisely.** Many people get “roped into” volunteering for an organization because their boss is involved with the charity or a family member is working on a community project. That can be

rewarding, but it’s more important to find what you love, and direct those energies into an organization that matches those passions. For instance, if you’re an animal lover, volunteer for a shelter or wildlife rescue mission.

❖ **Watch your schedule.**

Don’t let volunteer projects run your life. Most organizations will take as much time as you offer them, but that will leave most people burned out! If you only have a spare hour or two each week, they’ll accept that, too. Volunteering doesn’t have to take over your life. Do it right, and it’ll *add* more to your life than it takes *from* your calendar. ■

Quick Ideas

Work toward SMART Solutions

Specific: Be clear about what each employee will do, when, where, and how.

Measurable: Be clear about how the manager and employee(s) will be to determine that a given task or goal has actually been attained.

Achievable: Make sure that whatever solutions you agree on fits the solution; that it complies with the law and organizational policy; and that it’s fair. Don’t set up anyone to fail.

Realistic: Look at past performances to predict future actions; allow extra time for glitches and delays; don’t assume that the best-case scenario will come true.

Timed: Create reasonable deadlines; include ideas about what to do if something unexpected occurs; be willing to adjust and set new dates if necessary. ■

Source: *National Conflict Resolution Center.*



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