

Training the Next Generation – Part I

By Daniel Hughes

Research indicates that most current EA practitioners in the U.S. have completed advanced degrees in at least one or more professional disciplines. A recent study found that of this group, approximately 60% are social workers.

Not surprisingly, these findings were consistent with an earlier survey in 1986 that identified 39 graduate programs in social work that were offering courses containing employee assistance-related content. Of these, 17 said they had a specific occupational concentration in their programs designed to prepare social work students for workplace practice.

Alarming, only four such programs remain today. This raises the important question, *how and where will aspiring EA professionals learn the historic methods, techniques and theory of EA practice?*

The Challenge

The aging of the American workforce has become an increasingly important topic of concern, and the employee assistance field is no exception. In 2005, the average age of members of one large urban chapter of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) was 54. Clearly, sweeping demographic changes, technological innovation and globalization are dramatically reshaping the contemporary workplace.

These workplace trends raise many issues, particularly in the area of occupational knowledge retention, transfer, and professional training. This is especially true for established professions, whose current and future legitimacy is based on access to knowledge and technical proficiency.

Accordingly, each profession is faced with the crucial task of passing along its accumulated knowledge and expertise to the next generation of practitioners. *How is the employee assistance profession planning to retain its collective knowledge, while training the next generation for practice in an increasingly complex workplace?*

A Brief History of EA Training

Originally, many EA practitioners came from the ranks of recovering employees who were willing to assist their peers struggling with alcohol problems. Subsequently, a diverse but select group of early workplace oriented practitioners received additional training sponsored by the National Institute of Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse (NIAAA) in the methods and techniques developing with occupational alcoholism programs (OAP). They joined the ranks of a group known as, "The Thundering One Hundred". This elite cadre was

composed of two representatives from each state and given the charge to promote and diffuse methods and techniques demonstrated to be effective by the early OAPs.

This effort was varied, enthusiastic, and frequently informal but, nonetheless, effective. By the late 1970s, the OAPs were evolving into modern EAPs with the adoption of the “broad brush” practice model.

Additionally, research led to the development of EA core technology. Consequently, there was an increased need for practitioners with broader skill sets and specific mental health expertise. This created opportunities for a range of professionally trained individuals to enter the field. As a result, numerous academic programs began featuring EA content. These practitioners held degrees in various disciplines, including medicine, psychology, nursing, social work, and business. Unfortunately, specific graduate-level training programs in EA practice and theory never materialized despite substantial interest expressed by occupational social work programs.

Significantly, the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) established the Employee Assistance Certification Commission (EACC). The EACC developed and introduced the Certified Employee Assistance Professional (CEAP) credential in 1986. The CEAP was based on the principle of prerequisite hours of experiential learning, mentoring, and the successful completion of an exam in six domains of competence. Interestingly, no educational standards were required.

Similarly, no consensually agreed upon curriculum for EA education was developed. Apparently, experiential learning continues to be the mainstay of EA training. Accordingly, a recent study found a statistically significant relationship between years of practice in the field and knowledge of EA core technology.

Recent Training Surveys

A recent survey conducted by the author and sponsored by EAPA’s Research Panel revealed that, during the 2010-11 academic year, the four remaining social work schools with occupational specializations placed 34 students in EAPs for training internships. Of these, twenty-six (76%), were placed in internal programs; five (14%) were placed in Members Assistance Programs (MAP), and three (9%) were placed in external programs.

However, two of the students placed in the external EAPs were administrative and had no clinical or employee contact. *Disturbingly, one faculty member reported decreased interest among social work students regarding EA training placements due to the lack of post-graduation job opportunities.*

A contrasting perspective on current EA training activities was provided by a second survey conducted among members of the International Association of

Employee Assistance Programs in Education (IAEAPE). The IAEAPE is an innovative professional association composed primarily of internal EAPs providing services to colleges and universities.

Thirty-seven institutions responded to the survey, revealing that 46% were providing training opportunities to graduate students in seven different disciplines. Most of the 25 students in IAEAPE placements were enrolled in social work (53%) and counseling psychology (25%) programs.

However, marriage and family counseling, mental health counseling, psychiatry, and clinical psychology students were also included in the sample. Cumulatively, the IAEAPE programs providing internship opportunities have established training affiliations with 19 individual graduate schools across the country. *Significantly, several members of the IAEAPE have begun to develop teaching strategies for graduate-level EA training.*

Discussion

Most professions establish educational standards for entry-level practice. Therefore, professional schools have evolved with appropriate curricula-driven courses of study. Consequently, physicians attend medical school, lawyers attend law school, and social workers attend social work school. Early in the history of EAP field, 12-step programs were considered more relevant than graduate schools. However, contemporary employee assistance practice is based on a platform of increasingly sophisticated methods and techniques – ranging from performance-based identification and constructive confrontation – to behavioral risk assessment and critical incident management.

Daniel Hughes, Ph.D., CEAP, is the director of the Mount Sinai Medical Center's EAP and an assistant professor of preventative medicine at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine. Dan is a long-time EAPA member who lives and practices in New York City. This article originally appeared in the Journal of Employee Assistance (Vol. 41, No. 4), and is reprinted with permission. For a list of references used in this article, contact Dan at daniel.hughes@mssm.edu.

A version of this article originally appeared in the February 2012 issue of the Employee Assistance Report. It is reprinted with the permission of Impact Publications, Inc. For more information, visit: www.impact-publications.com