March 2019 Spotlight on Employee Assistance

Farrell Elected UK EAPA Chair
Eugene Farrell has been elected Chairman of the UK Employee Assistance Professionals Association. In the UK, EAP income is in excess of £70m per annum and provides support and mental health services to more than 8 million employees. Andrew Kinder was also elected Vice Chair. Read more here: https://www.eapa.org.uk/

Employee benefits - Including EAPs - Were 400 years in the Making
With unemployment hovering at historic lows, employers are beefing up their benefits and perks to attract candidates who aren’t necessarily actively looking for work but could be persuaded to make the leap for the right package. A survey from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) revealed that the vast majority (92%) of employees said benefits are important to their overall job satisfaction. Read a history of benefits from colonial times to the present here: https://www.fastcompany.com/90320349/your-employee-benefits-were-400-years-in-the-making

UBH Slammed by Judge for Fiduciary Failure
Judge Spero excoriated behavioral health giant United Behavioral Health (UBH), a subsidiary of UnitedHealth Group, for manipulating the criteria it used to approve mental health benefits to its plan subscribers.

A lead attorney in the case, Meiram Bendat, said the decision confirmed that “the country’s largest managed behavioral healthcare organization illegally denied mental health and substance use coverage based on flawed medical necessity criteria.” Read more here: https://www.forbes.com/sites/prudygourguechon/2019/03/07/ubh-slammed-by-judge-for-fiduciary-failure-can-the-case-help-us-understand-corporate-greed/#345be49e42dd

Preparing for Layoffs: An Employer’s Guide
It may seem strange to speak of reductions-in-force (RIFs) during this phase of the economic cycle. But recent mass layoffs in the automotive and other industries demonstrate that restructuring may be necessary at any time. In addition, employers should be up to date on new compliances related to sexual harassment. Here are some topics employers must address when planning and implementing a RIF: https://www.industryweek.com/leadership/preparing-layoffs-employer-s-guide
**Initial Opioid Prescriptions among U.S. Commercially Insured Patients, 2012–2017**

As the opioid crisis progressed between July 2012 and December 2017, many providers stopped initiating opioid therapy. Although the number of initial opioid prescriptions declined, a subgroup of providers continued to write high-risk initial opioid prescriptions. Read more: https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMsa1807069

**EA Professional Spotlight**

**Name and Position**
Lourie Terblanche, PhD
Professor at the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

**What do you like best about working in employee assistance?**
As an academic, I enjoy both lecturing to post-graduate students and promoting and doing research in the employee assistance and wellness fields.

A course-work master’s program in EAPs was introduced in my department in 2001 for social workers and non-social workers (two separate programs running concurrently). A research project was part of the requirements, in addition to course-work which had to be completed in the first year of registration.

This program is currently under revision in terms of curriculum content and delivery mode, in order to ensure that the latest trends in the field are accommodated and to ensure maximum access to students with different needs.

The master’s program was the first of its kind to be offered by a South African University and has contributed to almost a new generation of professionals who are promoting the EAP concept with confidence and pride. To date 64 masters’ students and ten doctoral students have qualified under my supervision with research topics in the EAP and wellness fields. A few additional master graduates have qualified under the supervision of colleagues in the same department.

The richness and variety of the research topics are a rewarding reflection of the growth in the field.

**What was your first job in employee assistance?**
On 1 December 1983 I was appointed as an EAP Consultant to the Chamber of Mines (COM) of South Africa. The COM is a coordinating structure between different mines and mining houses and is responsible for promoting the work-life of mine workers by attending primarily to wages/salaries, housing and medical care of all mine workers. I was then tasked to do a feasibility study on the concept of the EAP for the mining industry, due to the dire need for the enhancement of psycho-social services rendered at the time. The feasibility study was completed during 1985 and the recommendations were accepted.

The first of eight Centers for Human Development was created in one of the main mining areas in 1986. These Centers consisted of a multi-professional team, which provided for intake, assessment and counseling at the different mines, to replace the in-patient treatment of mine workers.

**What is the most challenging part of your job?**
The most challenging part of my job is to create and promote a culture of research among EA and wellness professionals. Students are often interested in expansion of their knowledge and skills, but not necessarily in taking up research opportunities.

**What inspires you?**
The dynamics in the fields of EA and Wellness, measured against the enthusiasm within the EAP fraternity, which has resulted in a tremendous growth in the field since 1985.

Working with fellow-professionals both nationally and internationally creates tremendous energy. I am continuously surprised by the openness and accommodating attitude amongst professionals in the field.

Involvement over years with EAPA and EAPA-South Africa has created growth opportunities, which would not have otherwise materialized.

*Dr. Terblanche is Past President of the South Africa Chapter of EAPA. In 2018 he received a Special Recognition Award for his commitment to the employee assistance profession from EAPA-SA.*