

Five ways to make the most out of your EAP

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A 2011 survey found EAPs are the third most likely health benefit to be available to employees, but they are also widely misunderstood, by both employees and HR managers. So what can you do to get more from your EAP?

Get more by asking for less:

Warren Shepell, president of EAP Specialist Inc. says HR managers should ask their EAP provider to un-bundle their services to regain focus on what their organization actually needs.

"EAPs now offer such a wide range of services, from child care and elder care to counseling," he said. "There are services, such as mental health care, that are more valuable but more expensive for the EAP to deliver. In many cases the extraneous services aren't the ones most needed by an organization."

Be a more conscious consumer or hire a third party:

Choose your EAP provider based not only on the services they provide but how they deliver them. They may offer counseling services but offer them via phone or video rather than face-to-face. Is that the best method of delivery?

Shepell said in many cases it's not.

"I heard of a case recently where an individual was seeking retirement planning and counseling. She called her EAP provider requesting face-to-face counseling only to be turned down. The EAP told her that telephone counseling at her desk was her only option. How could she maintain her privacy getting counseling at her desk surrounded by co-workers?"

Telephonic and online counseling is cheaper for the EAP provider and usually far shorter than face-to-face counseling and, yet, you as an employer are paying the same amount per user.

If you don't have time to sift through the details of your EAP, ask for help. An independent professional can walk you through your options and help you decide which services are best for your organization.

Ask for data from your EAP provider:

Many HR managers may not be aware just how much data should be available to them through their EAP.

Shepell says the only information protected by privacy issues are the name of the employee and the details of the conversation. All other data, including employee participation and drop-out rates, how many sessions provided and the mode of delivery should be available to you.

Conduct your own research:

Don't rely on EAP data alone. A simple anonymous survey of your employee's use of their EAP and their knowledge of what's available to them can be a powerful tool.

Communicate those services:

Many employees mistrust EAP providers, mistakenly believing that the service isn't confidential. Communicating to your employees the services that are available to them, the mode of delivery and the confidentiality can improve participation.

Shepell suggests reminding employees regularly about the importance of addressing mental health and stress, and also reminding staff what your organization is doing to support them.