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Congratulations from the United States to the Employee Development Service of Hong Kong Christian Service



It is an honor to write this article in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Employee Development Service of Hong Kong Christian Service (HKCS). At the inception of this service, I was fortunate to be asked by HKCS to help them in the design and implementation of this new employment development service (also known as employee assistance programs, or EAPs). The HKCS EAP was one of the first indigenous programs in Asia. Under the leadership of Mr. Ng, we developed policies, procedures, and materials for the formation of the program. From the beginning, MR. Ng insisted that the highest standards be implemented. We also trained staff in appropriate methods for counseling as well as consulting with managers. In further visits, we then met with companies to explain the program. HCKS continues to grow, and I am proud to have been identified with them from the beginning.

Since then, EAPs have grown in Asia. "The last few years have seen notable changes in the regional landscape. In China, Japan and Singapore, governments appeared to be taking the initiative as they see EAP value as an organizational means for meeting social and occupational health challenges in their countries. Perceived as a strategic means of establishing prevention and early intervention capacity, the governments promoted greater a wareness about the usefulness of EAPs. In China, a sober concern involved the issue of increasing work demands and the potential negative effects on the social fabric of families contributing to a "disharmonising" effect on the cohesiveness of Chinese society.

The rising incidences of workplace stress and karojisatsu or work-related suicides in Japan probably contributed to the legislation of corporate responsibility for their staff's mental well-being. In 2005 the Japanese Ministry of Labor, Health and Welfare introduced guidelines for the recording of work hours and the warning that excessive work hours could be violation of labor laws" (Mun, 4th International Employee Assistance Compendium, 2010). Japan has taken a unique and admiral step to ensure EAPs meet the highest standards. The law stipulates occupational physicians as being responsible for monitoring the programs. The only school of occupational medicine in Japan – the University of Occupational and Environmental Health (UOEH) - purchased the right from the U.S.'s Council of Accreditation to use their standards and procedures when accrediting Japanese programs. UOEH is in the process of adapting these standards and procedures specifically for their culture, and will shortly begin accrediting the EAPs in Japan. I have the privilege to work with UOEH in this process, and I consider this development a way of countering the current trend of EAPs being run only as a business and not as a profession.

"In Singapore, it was likely that change stemmed from manpower resource crunches and workplace productivity coupled with a mental health survey indicating that a significant number of Singaporean workers were at risk of mental illnesses. Singapore made a significant financial commitment in 2007 and 2009 to build a mentally resilient society. Such government initiatives tended to be viewed as credible and both public and private enterprises usually take government guidelines and policy announcements seriously" (Mun).

It is also important to recognize the establishment, in 2003, of the Asia Pacific Employee Assistance Roundtable (APEAR). "APEAR was officially registered as a society in Singapore on 12 April 2005. By then, the original informal committee's intention that APEAR would continue as an annual regional event had already taken off on its own momentum. Since the first conference was held in 2003, five annual conferences were subsequently organized" (Mun). APEAR is similar to the Employee Assistance Forum, which was established several years prior for European EAPs.

We now see that EAPs are a world-wide phenomenon. In the 4th International EAP Compendium recently published by Masi Research Consultants, we have articles by indigenous authors from 50 different countries, representing every continent except Antarctica.

In viewing EAPs today, it is important that the trend of cost-containment as a primary goal be stopped. There has not been enough emphasis on the professionalization of the field to include uniform ethics, standards, and procedures. Unless this is done, regardless of the country, EAPs will not achieve what they were intended to accomplish. For those that are interested, my article in the 4th International EAP Compendium "Redefining the EAP Field" might be of interest.

As was pointed out by the authors throughout the 4th International EAP Compendium, the lack of training is a critical problem for the EAP field. In order to counter-balance this, the Catholic University in Washington, DC, along with Masi Research Consultants has formed the first EAP on-line school. Courses include EAPs in the New Millennium, Contemporary EAP Services, Advanced EAP Clinical Service Delivery: Mental Health and Addictions, and Qualitative and Quantitative Evaluations of EAPs (for more information, visit <http://eap.cua.edu>)

In closing, I want to again wish Mr. Ng and the staff at HKCS my congratulations on this 20th anniversary celebration. I have the strongest confidence that they will continue to perform at the highest levels that EAPs have to offer.

ENDNOTES

APEAR: From Conferencing to Intentional Growing. Yam Keng Mun. In 4th International Employee Assistance Compendium. Dale Masi and Carl Tisone, editors. Masi Research Consultants, Inc. (2010).

To order the 4th International EAP Compendium, visit www.eapmasi.com