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**PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES FOR CONTROL OF
JOB STRESS IN THE FEDERAL WORKPLACE**

*Wendell Joice, Ph.D.
Office of Personnel Management
Washington, D.C.*

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A couple of weeks ago, the American Psychological Association and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health held a conference in Washington, D.C. entitled "Stress in the 90's." At this conference the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) conducted a session on "Programs and Resources for the Control of Job Stress in the Federal Workplace." I am going to present an overview of that three-hour session and some related information from the conference. My discussion will cover:

- o Stress Terminology and Models
- o Selected Programs and Resources
- o Evaluation Research
- o Some Concerns About Our Progress
- o Plans to Expand Our Efforts at OPM.

Stress Terminology and Models

At the conference and in my readings I noticed that there is still a lack of a clear and generally accepted definition of what we mean by stress. Not only does this cause methodological problems for our research efforts, but it also affects our ability to identify relevant issues and target populations. Our ability to design and integrate programs and resources is likewise hindered. As social scientists, however, we always seem to be struggling with definitions, concepts, constructs, and paradigms. Fortunately, I do not need to resolve this issue here, and I mention it only because I considered it when selecting programs and resources to include in this presentation.

I also noticed that there was an abundance of different models which served as a basis for the various theories and programs. Actually, I find these models helpful and have selected some more-or-less standard ones to reference my comments.

Treatment Intervention: Primary, Secondary, Tertiary

A commonly used treatment intervention model presented at the conference included primary, secondary, and tertiary treatment interventions. The model was focused on workplace issues by defining primary intervention as addressing workplace demands; secondary intervention as addressing worker reaction, adjustment and accommodation to these demands; and tertiary intervention as addressing the worker in distress. Most Federal and non-Federal programs appear to be focused on secondary interventions. Looked at another way, most of our activity appears to focus on the individual worker; that is, on managing and reducing the symptoms of worker strain, both physiological and psychological.

Programs and Resources

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

All Federal Agencies are required to have or provide access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). Currently, approximately one-half of the EAP programs are in-house and the other half are run by contractors. Some Agencies pool their resources and utilize EAP cooperatives such as those established by the Cooperative Administrative Support Unit Program of the President's Council on Management Improvement. During Fiscal Year 1991, approximately 78,000 employees used Federal EAPs. Nearly all EAPs have some sort of stress management program and provide short-term treatment for stress-related problems. In a related initiative, since 1987 approximately 861,000 Federal supervisors and managers have been trained in assisting troubled employees and referring them to EAPs.

Worksite Health Promotion Programs

Worksite health promotion programs were initiated in the wellness movement of the 1980's to bring broader perspective to occupational health activities and to be more outreach and prevention-oriented. Regarding stress control, these programs operate in the realization of the beneficial connection between fitness, wellness, and stress.

NASA has one of the star health promotion programs in the Federal Government. Various other Federal agencies have less elaborate health promotion programs, some of which are reviewed in a 1991 Office of Personnel Management (OPM) publication entitled "Worksite Health Promotion." Another star program is the one at the Army Materiel Command in Virginia. Like NASA's program, the Army Materiel Command program uses comprehensive health risk appraisals, medical screening protocols, and fitness facilities. Medical data obtained on incoming participants is fed into an automated system which maintains an extensive research database and which provides same-day diagnostics including intervention needs. Many of the interventions are handled in once-a-week, 60-minute training sessions which range from four to eight weeks in duration. The Program Manager reports that more than 5,000 employees have participated in the Army Materiel Command Program.

Work and Family Movement

Many Federal Agencies are actively involved in the work and family movement. One of the goals of this movement is to reduce employee stress by helping them achieve a healthy balance between their work and family lives. The Office of Personnel Management has established a Federal Work and Family Program Center which provides policy guidance, training, and technical assistance to Federal Agencies. OPM has also established the Interagency Partnership on Work and Family. This partnership works to establish coordinated Federal efforts in this area. Many Agencies have established their own work and family centers to focus on their particular initiatives such as work and family counselors and support groups. The work and family counselors are separate from the EAP counselors and provide counseling, resource and referral services focusing on balancing work and family life.

Dependent Care Programs

Primary among existing work and family programs are the dependent care programs. The Federal Government currently has between 800 and 900 child care centers for its workers. Most of these are in the Department of Defense (DoD). The General Services Administration (GSA) has established an Office of Child Care and development programs to provide technical assistance. At least two Agencies, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are working on the establishment of adult day care centers.

Organizational Intervention Model: Control, Clarity, Conflict Management

An intervention model that applies to many of our recently developed organizational programs was discussed by Dr. James Quick at the "Stress in the 90's" conference mentioned earlier. This model focuses on organizational and work redesign interventions for reducing occupational stress. The three components are to:

1. Increase the amount of employee control over work and work environment. This has been a popular issue of late.
2. Increase the amount of clarity in the work environment, especially in terms of expectations, policies, communications, and consequences.
3. Improve the management of conflict so that individuals professionalize if not personalize their conflicts.

I think that the following programs fit this model.

Additional Programs

With supervisor approval, Federal employees may use a combination of annual leave, sick leave, and leave without pay for parental and family responsibilities. Currently, nineteen Federal Agencies have formal dependent care leave policies.

The employee option of flexible work schedules, Flexitime, is widely available in many Federal Agencies. We estimate that 54 percent of Federal employees with dependent care needs work under Flexitime schedules.

The Office of Personnel Management has designated an office to coordinate and encourage Agency use of job sharing and part-time employment programs.

My favorite program, however, is Flexiplace, which allows employees to work at home or at geographically convenient satellite offices. Federal Agencies have the authority to establish Flexiplace programs, and at least fourteen have done so. Participants in this program have specified stress reduction as one of its primary benefits.

Other benefits cited by the participants include reduced commuting time and more control over time and environment. Between 800 and 1,000 employees currently participate in Flexiplace. We have completed an evaluation of the pilot program and the results are very positive, especially job performance and employee morale.

All Federal employees have access to formal dispute resolution mechanisms such as filing grievances. Human resources professionals have realized that disputes handled in the traditional formal and legalistic fashion usually add more stress to an already stressful situation. This is because someone becomes a winner and someone becomes a loser. Various Agencies such as the General Accounting Office (GAO) have turned to mediation. A neutral person helps two or more individuals explore ways to resolve their differences and arrive at an agreement that does not focus on win/lose or right/wrong. Beyond that, however, employee relations counselors at the Los Alamos National Laboratory believe they have improved upon the mediation approach by using dual advocacy mediation. This type of mediation utilizes two counselors who meet separately with the conflicting parties. They prepare the parties for mediation, meet with each other to plan the mediation, participate in the mediation, and develop relapse prevention plans.

A few Agencies are working to reduce stressors associated with their physical work spaces. The EPA has a unit which focuses on indoor air quality and sponsors an International Research and Advocacy Society for reducing indoor air pollution. The IRS has a Research and Technical Advisory Unit which focuses on ergonomic factors and the establishment of a comfortable and injury-free work space.

Finally, when things get really rough, some Agencies have programs designed for crisis intervention, such as the Traumatic Incident Program at the IRS and a similar program at the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).

Evaluation Research

Shifting our focus to resources, I will mention a few research studies that you may find interesting.

- o Last year, the National Center for Health Fitness published a comprehensive evaluation of the Army Materiel Command's Health Promotion Project. It

covers 2,700 participants and reports impact findings on health indicators, sick leave, productivity, and cost benefit.

- o The Office of Personnel Management will soon publish its final report on the work-at-home component of the Flexiplace Project. The findings will include job performance, health impact, sick leave, operational costs, etc.

In addition, the Office of Personnel Management has recently published several other studies which bear on our topic. These include:

- o S.O.F.E., a comprehensive survey of 32,000 Federal employees containing attitude, behavioral, and organizational information useful to considerations of employee stress.
- o A study of the work and family needs of the Federal work force and a report on Federal EAPs.
- o The General Accounting Office recently published "The Changing Workforce," which compares Federal and non-Federal work and family programs.

Concerns About Our Progress: Program Availability, Cost Benefit, Outcome/Efficacy, Symptoms and Individuals

As you may have noticed, many of the programs mentioned here are only available at some Agencies. Where programs are available, even Government-wide, they are often only available to a limited number of employees. We need to find and utilize ways to make these programs more broadly available, not just for the benefit of employees, but also for evaluation purposes. It really does not serve us well to talk about programs that are not sufficiently available to have the impact for which they were designed.

With this in mind, managers and health professionals alike would be more inclined to utilize programs if they had access to broadly accepted cost benefit

information as well as solid research findings supporting program effectiveness. Currently, such information is hard to find.

As I mentioned earlier, there have been some concerns about our tendency to focus on stress management and individual adjustment. Many social scientists believe that we should place more emphasis on primary interventions that involve preventive measures such as organizational, workplace, and job redesign. One school of thought holds that stress experts and educators may be doing more harm than good by teaching people to "manage stress." It points out that, despite the proliferation of such techniques, millions of Americans continue to die and American business continues to lose billions of dollars from stress-related illnesses. Indeed, the stress epidemic appears to be worsening rather than improving. This school of thought maintains that instead of encouraging people to manage stress we should encourage them and their employers to focus on and resolve the specific problems troubling them; that we should be ready to apply organizational, environmental, or other external remedies as well as traditional individual therapies.

OPM Plans: Ongoing Research, Organizational Diagnosis, System Integration, Consultation/Referral, Healthy Companies

Mindful of these concerns and of the growing magnitude of the workplace stress problem, the Office of Personnel Research and Development at OPM is planning to expand its efforts to assist Agencies to achieve and maintain health Federal workplaces. We have put together the following tentative plans and, additionally, are open to any Agency recommendations regarding our role in this effort.

To begin with, we would like to establish ongoing research using Government-wide perspective and taking collective advantage of existing databases. The research would focus on areas such as outcomes, cost benefit, individual and organizational performance, and program utilization. We would also like to develop an efficient and accurate approach to organizational diagnosis and follow-up which would include methods of projecting gains and losses associated with the level and quality of management response to indicated problems.

We have noticed a great deal of fragmentation in the Federal approach to the healthy workplace. This is true at both the Government-wide and Agency-wide levels. In some cases, we have numerous programs all working separately with little coordination of their activities. We would like to design and encourage the implementation of integrated programs that can benefit from a united effort. As we develop expertise, information, and Federal networks, we will provide consultation and referral services to organizations and Agencies.

We have already joined a public/private partnership called Healthy Companies, and we plan to assist them with a fairly ambitious research effort they are undertaking. This research focuses on qualitative assessments of policies, practices, cost benefits, and employee attitudes along fourteen identified dimensions of a health workplace.

Finally, in response to concerns expressed to us by EAP practitioners, we plan to work with our Federal Employee Health Care policy people to establish a closer working relationship between health care providers and our EAP practitioners. Along these same lines, we plan to see if there are ways we can improve the mental health benefits offered by our managed care providers.