

24-hour poison info is a phone call away

Healthcare professionals and the public are welcome to seek advice

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MADAM Baey Geok Chum takes as many as 10 pills a day for Systemic Lupus Erythematosus. So when her friends recommended that she start taking traditional Chinese medicines such as *lingzhi* for the disease, she was anxious about whether it would do more harm than good.

“I got confused as to whether I should start taking herbal remedies because I take a lot of prednisolone (a type of steroid),” she said.

Mdm Baey, and other Singaporeans who need similar advice, may not be aware that help is just a telephone call away, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Set up last May, the Drug and Poison Information Centre (DPIC) is a collaboration between the Accident and Emergency (A&E) and Pharmacy departments of Singapore General Hospital.

Funded by the Ministry of Health, the non-profit centre aims to provide drug and poison information for healthcare professionals and the public – in both emergency and non-emergency situations.

It is also a primary resource for poison education, prevention and treatment in Singapore and fields about 300 to 350 calls a month.

Ms Shyamala Narayanaswamy, pharmacist-in-charge at the DPIC, said in cases of poisoning or accidental ingestion of chemicals, the centre is able to offer first aid advice based on the substance and quantity ingested.

For example, if a child eats a non-toxic substance such as a crayon or lipstick, there is no need to send him to the emergency department if there is no choking. The DPIC will be able to offer advice over the phone and help monitor the situation. The centre can also recommend if a visit to the A&E is required.

This way, “caregivers have someone to call to allay their fears and get advice. They don’t have to rush to the emergency department and

incur the undue stress and cost associated with such a visit,” said Ms Shyamala.

Breastfeeding mothers, women on Hormone Replacement Therapy and people taking medications for chronic illness may also use the hotline to check if it is all right to take generic medication for headaches or coughs.

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– Ms Shyamala Narayanaswamy, DPIC pharmacist-in-charge, on how the hotline can be effectively used

Ms Shyamala said the DPIC hotline is an information service and it is not intended to contradict or replace a physician’s advice.

Callers must be prepared to identify themselves and offer information about their medical history and prescriptions in order to help the centre deal with the case more effectively.

“Always know what medication and dosage you are on,” advised Ms Shyamala.

Also, clearly label all cleaning products, and be sure to inform your general practitioner if you are on medication for a chronic illness.

For more information, visit <http://dpic.sgh.com.sg>. Call the DPIC hotline at 6423 9119 for drug and poison advice. For non-emergencies, email your queries to gaedpic@sgh.com.sg