

SGH Newsroom

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One-stop Drug & Poison Information Centre at SGH



A centralized Drug and Poison Information Centre (DPIC) has been seen up at the SGH Department of Emergency Medicine. The project, which is funded under the Ministry of Health's Health Service Development Programme (HSDP), is designed to provide information to health professionals and members of the public on the signs and symptoms of poisoning, as well as treatment in acute cases.

Need for centralised Information

In a study conducted by the SGH Department of Emergency Medicine in 1998, it was found that side effects from drugs and allergic reactions to medications were two problems commonly encountered by healthcare professionals. Alcohol-related problems, adverse effects of traditional medicines, poisonings and drug reactions formed the rest of the drug and toxicological problems commonly seen by physicians in their practice.

In another earlier study, the department also found that most physicians, including General Practitioners, were keen on managing poisonings and adverse drug reactions problems if they have access to the necessary information and resources. Currently, healthcare professionals refer to the Drug Information Services available at the six public hospitals and the Poison Information Centre at the [Health Sciences Authority](#), which together manage a total of 1,500 enquiries on drugs and poisons each year. The decentralised information hub means that many instances of poisonings are managed locally with varying consequences in terms of morbidity, and most adverse reactions are often not reported, making it difficult to identify and recognise trends, especially in cases of mass poisoning.

"The two studies highlighted the need for a centralised drug and poison information resources to assist physicians in better managing their patients," explains Dr R Ponampalam, Consultant at the SGH Department of Emergency Medicine and Director of the project. "This provided the impetus to set up a single, 24-hour centralised information bureau - a one-stop resource centre for drug and poison information at just a phone call away."

The Drug and Poison Information Centre is manned round the clock by Drug Information Officers, backed by a team of experienced drug information pharmacists and clinical toxicologist, offering information on both poison and drug-related problems.

The Poison Information Services provide information on toxicity, signs and symptoms and treatment of poisoning, helping callers answer enquiries on subjects ranging from poisonings involving medicines, household commodities, agricultural chemicals, industrial chemicals, cosmetics to poisonous plants and insects. The Drug Information Services will assist callers with details on drug identification, side effects and interactions, as well as dosage and formulation, among others.

The Drug Information Officers are also trained to offer professional consultation to healthcare professionals to help them make clinically sound judgement in managing cases of poisonings. They can also provide instructions in the first-aid management in the event of a poison emergency.

Response Time

While the service is available round the clock, seven days a week, Dr Ponampalam emphasises that priority will be given to calls associated with emergency poison cases, as well as enquiry from healthcare professionals on poisoning management. This is because one of the objectives of the service is to reduce unnecessary visits and referrals to the Emergency Departments and also to ensure rapid optimum

treatment for cases of poisoning. Depending on the complexity of the information required, the DPIC has set the benchmark for estimated turnaround time for complete information within 15 minutes for 80% of the call load.

Another important role for the DPIC is that of education, which according to Dr Ponampalam, is critical in increasing public awareness of poisoning. "The most effective way to address poisonings is through prevention," he shares, adding that relevant education programmes for healthcare professionals and the general public on poisoning are in the pipeline.

In addition, the Drug and Poison Information Centre also hopes to collect and disseminate accurate relevant statistics on poisoning by conducting toxic surveillance on exposures through collating calls logged at the DPIC. These statistics will be used to identify trends in poisoning or toxic clusters or incidents of mass poisoning. It will also help to identify areas in which preventative measures need to be taken, or where additional educational activity is required.

For more information on the Drug and Poison Information Centre, please contact Tel: 6423 9119 or Fax: 6324 2991.