

Oral Abstracts

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FACEBOOK, FACTSHEETS AND PHONE CALLS: THE IMPACT OF A DEDICATED TOXICOVIGILANCE POSITION ON POISONING PREVENTION AND UTILISATION OF AN AUSTRALIAN POISONS INFORMATION SERVICE

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Objectives: The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends Poisons Information Centres (PIC) involvement in toxicovigilance activities which develop, implement and measure the prevention of poisonings.¹ Practice standards for Australian Poisons Information Centres also support these activities.² A dedicated toxicovigilance position was created at the New South Wales Poisons Information Centre (NSWPIC) to enhance poisoning prevention and to promote the service. This study aims to evaluate the impact of this position on poisoning awareness/prevention and Australian PIC call volumes.

Methods: The toxicovigilance position was created in June 2015, and was the first of its kind in Australia. Content of the NSWPIC website was refreshed with new factsheets to coordinate with current research activities and increase community awareness of high risk poisonings, including carbon monoxide (CO). A Facebook page was created and a media policy was devised to cover the specific responsibilities of a PIC. Relationships were established with public relations departments and the media. Content for promotion of the PIC service was linked to our research and community/health department concerns as determined by scanning other web-based media.

Results: Media interactions by NSWPIC have increased from 3 to 17 in the 12 months since June 2015. NSWPIC website activity has increased steadily since its launch to over 3500 visits/month. The exponential nature of Facebook sharing saw our initial post on the safe storage of medications reach over 500,000 people internationally. Since the targeted winter campaign on CO poisoning there have been no serious accidental CO poisonings reported to the NSWPIC thus far this winter. Last winter there were 3 deaths due to CO reported by media. Call numbers to the NSWPIC increased consistently since March 2016, reversing the declining trend seen over previous years. Other Australian PICs recorded similar call volume increases. Reasons behind this increase are likely to be multifactorial, however, given that all four Australian PICs share a national phone number it would be reasonable to assume that promotion of the NSWPIC service has had a flow on effect to all centres.

Conclusion: Establishment of a dedicated toxicovigilance position enabled a focus on poisoning prevention and promotion of the service. This increased service utilisation and public awareness. The exponential nature of Facebook has been particularly effective at spreading the message. Initial focus has been on prevention of accidental poisonings, however there is a plan to expand the toxicovigilance activity to incorporate prevention of deliberate self harm and recreational substance abuse.

1. World Health Organisation. Guidelines for poison control. Available at http://www.who.int/ipcs/publications/training_poisons/guidelines_poison_control/en/index1.html
2. Robinson J, Wylie C, Lynch C, Lynch A. Practice Standards for Australian Poisons Information Centres 2014. Available at [http://www.austin.org.au/Assets/Files/Practice%20Standards%20for%20Australian%20Poisons%20Information%20Centres%202014\[2\].pdf](http://www.austin.org.au/Assets/Files/Practice%20Standards%20for%20Australian%20Poisons%20Information%20Centres%202014[2].pdf)