



## Methanol outbreaks – Awareness, training and prevention

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In spite of a selection of toxicological centers in the developing world, there are many countries where no toxicological service is available, and the majority of patients are seen by emergency doctors and health care professionals with limited training in toxicology. In order to minimize the gap of knowledge in toxicology, a set of different efforts are being made to improve the general toxicology training, such as Wikitox (<http://curriculum.toxicology.wikispaces.net>) and The GetUp project by ACMT. Some specific topics such as methanol poisoning may warrant for a more widely disseminated and focused model in addition to this: Since methanol poisonings typically pose a lot of diagnostic problems, thousands of poisonings are likely to pass without ever getting the diagnosis. Identifying the victims is sometimes hampered by religious or cultural obstacles: Patients and their relatives can be reluctant to seek medical attention because of the shame or fear of being punished. Added to that, using ethanol as an antidote can be an issue in certain cultures. By increasing the awareness and the knowledge of these poisonings, they can be unveiled early, resulting in more effective treatment and improved outcome.

Different approaches have been suggested to improve the warning systems and awareness of methanol in the surroundings, such as Active Case Finding also known from the tuberculosis testing programs. In order to address the lack of awareness, the lack of knowledge and the limitations in diagnostics and therapeutics, a Memorandum of Understanding was written between the medical humanitarian organization Doctors without Borders (Médecins sans Frontières/MSF) and experts in clinical toxicology from Oslo University Hospital (OUH) in 2012: The goal of this project called The Methanol Poisoning initiative (MPi), is to decrease the morbidity and mortality of methanol poisoning globally, as well as raise the awareness and knowledge about the poisoning per se. MPi started as a task force to be launched for clinical support during larger outbreaks<sup>2</sup>, whereas it now also has developed towards a more structured training in endemic areas *before* the incidents arise. It also develops a set of tools such as simplified protocols adapted to local conditions, posters in various languages, an animation movie for the public and other stake holders (see [www.msf.no/mpii](http://www.msf.no/mpii)), and it contributes to the development of bedside diagnostics. A second more detailed part of the animation movie is currently under development for healthcare personnel. Awareness, training and prevention of methanol poisonings faces many challenges, but various approaches to solve these can be used, and even small efforts can prove beneficial.