

Poison Prevention Press

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Daily Case Conference

SPI's, other MPC staff members, and students take part in a daily case conference.

- Serious cases are reviewed and discussed, including information on the substance(s) involved, any challenges, and the plan for managing the case
- Discuss journal articles about cases similar to the current cases
- Review the similarities and differences between cases with similar substances involved

While teleworking during the pandemic, staff were able to continue holding case conference virtually. This allowed more learners to attend, even one from another country!

Did you know that...

- Our 13 poison specialists have a combined 250+ years of experience working at the poison center?
- Poison specialists take an exam to become certified and have to retake the exam every seven years?

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A Day in the Life of a Poison Center

"Hello. My mother is in her 90s and accidentally took my medicine instead of hers. Will she be okay?"

"Hello. My child put baby wipes in her mouth and sucked on them. What is going to happen?"

These are a few examples of how calls coming into poison centers start. Here's a snapshot of a single day in March 2021, when one to five specialists in poison information (SPI's) were on duty at any given time. Together, they managed 121 new cases on this day.

Incoming calls came from the public, doctors, nurses, paramedics, and police officers. The ages of patients ranged from nine months to 92 years. There were even a few calls about pets. Many of the cases were about medicines (prescription and over-the-counter) and drugs of abuse. Other calls included:

- **Personal Care Products:** diaper rash ointment, baby wipes, and hair bleach
- **Household Products:** disinfectants
- **Foreign Objects:** slime and styrofoam beads
- **Miscellaneous:** fire extinguisher

For each case that comes in, our poison specialists first take a full history. They ask many questions to help them get a clear picture of what has happened and how the patient is doing. Next, the specialist combines the information given with their training and resources to tell the caller what treatment is needed and whether it can be managed where they are or if they must go to the hospital. Finally, the specialist informs the caller about the effects that can be expected in that situation.

But, our specialists' work does not end with incoming calls. They also make follow-up calls to check on patients in hospitals or at home. During a follow-up call, the specialist asks how the patient is doing and what treatment they received. They also make additional recommendations, if needed, to make sure the patient is getting the best possible care.

Our specialists receive calls not only from the public, but also from doctors who consult them for cases. There could be multiple calls coming in at one time or there might be a period of time when no calls come in. During the times when there are fewer incoming calls, poison specialists often conduct follow-up calls or review literature and research.

The work of a poison specialist is challenging. The SPI's' backgrounds as pharmacists or nurses, as well as their training and continued learning at the poison center, allow them to manage all of the cases presented to them.

Remember, poisonings can happen to anyone at any time. If you suspect you or someone else has been exposed to a poison, call the 1-800-222-1222 right away. Do not wait for symptoms.