Poison Center Awareness among the Parents of Pediatric Patients in a Primary Care Setting

Mathew George • Ashley Delgaudio

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To the Editor,

The Awareness of Poison Center Services Among Parents in a Pediatric Primary Care Practice

The poison center service is one of the most important aspects of preventive health in America. There are 61 accredited poison centers in America. These centers are available at no charge to the caller 24 h a day, every day of the year. Poison Centers respond to questions from the public and healthcare professionals. Every year, poison prevention week is observed basically to enhance the awareness of the poison centers in the community. We conducted a survey to determine the awareness of poison center activities among the parents of pediatric patients in the community.

The setting was a pediatric office in private multi-specialty practice. The age of the patient population that is seen in the practice ranged from 0 to 18 years; however, since the subjects were the parents of the patients, the age of the subjects surveyed was not included in the study. The study subjects included the parents of the pediatric patients who visited the clinic for well child preventive care. The survey period was 30 days, and all duplicate visits were avoided. Either the parents or the legal guardian was asked five questions: whether they are aware of the poison center services, whether they know specifically the poison center number, their primary language, whether they ever called

poison center in the past, and the number of persons below 18 years who lived in the same household. The total numbers of parents/caregivers who took part in the survey were 216.

One hundred and seventy-four caregivers (174/216) reported that they are aware of the poison center services. Forty-two (42/216) care givers said they never knew of poison center service. None of the caregivers specifically knew the 1-800-222-1222 number. The majority of the caregivers (144/216) were English speaking, and non-English speaking care givers comprised of 72 out of 216. One significant observation was that 24 of the 42 caregivers who were unaware of the poison center services were non-English speaking. The household of the caregivers who were aware of the Poison center services had 2.2 children while the household of the caregivers who were unaware of the poison center services had 3.3 children.

This is the first study of its kind. Only 80% of the parents had awareness about the poison center services while 20% of the study subjects were unaware of this important service. None of the parents knew the 1–800 number of the poison center; however, most of them agreed they had the number in their home either in front of the refrigerator or in the phone book. The awareness amongst the non-English speaking community is comparatively low as shown in the study; among the parents who were unaware of the poison center services, approximately 57% (24/42) were of non-English speaking. Almost 2.4 million poison exposures were reported in the National Poison Data System on 2007 [1]. Poison Center Support, Enhancement and Awareness Act of Public Law 110–377, 2008 intends to develop initiatives to foster the enhanced poison center outreach and public health utilization of national poison data [2]. Increased poison center awareness of the poison

M. George (✉)
Maine Medical Center,
22 Bramhall Street,
Portland, ME, USA
e-mail: georgm@mmc.org

A. Delgaudio
MS 4, Albany Medical College,
Albany, NY, USA

center services could prevent emergency department(ED) crowding. Each ED visit costs \$700 while a poison center call cost approximately \$37. The same study revealed that increased poison center calls appear to be associated with reduced ED use for unintentional poisoning and appear to reduce net medical spending [3]. It is appropriate to conclude that the poison center fosters substantial health-care dollar savings. Although the poison centers are engaged in effective poison outreach program, this survey reveals that there is a potential of much further expanded poison center awareness.

References

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