Care of Poisoned Patients
Disclaimer

While individual practitioners may differ, this is the position of the College at the time written, after a review of the issue and pertinent literature.

Background

- Medical toxicology is a field of medicine that focuses on prevention, diagnosis and management of poisonings and other adverse effects of drugs, chemicals and biological toxicants.
- Medical toxicology is a subspecialty of emergency medicine, pediatrics and preventive medicine and was approved by the American Board of Medical Specialties and the American Medical Association’s Council on Medical Education.
- Certified regional poison information centers are a valuable source of telephone consultations with medical toxicologists available to all physicians in the US.
- Centers for poison treatment are specialty treatment centers with goals of excellence in clinical care, teaching and research in medical toxicology. The critical resources offered by centers for poison treatment are the dedicated leadership by experts in medical toxicology and ready availability of essential services and treatments. Facility Assessment Guidelines have been approved and published by the American Academy of Clinical Toxicology (AACT), then revised by the ACMT.
- The American College of Emergency Physicians’ (ACEP) policy statement on Poison Information and Treatment Systems states that “high-quality poison treatment … will be enhanced by use of centers for poison treatment, where available, for serious or unusual poisonings.”
- The Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM) has stated that “When a patient needs services that exceed the available resources of a facility, the patient should be transferred to a facility with the required resources and has established guidelines for transfer of critically ill patients.”

Data

- Poisonings are the third most common cause of fatal injuries in the US.
- Currently there are over 300 physicians board-certified in medical toxicology offering consultations in North America.
- Numerous studies and surveys have found that most hospitals have inadequate stocks of essential and more often required antidotes.
- Patient Management by a Center for Poison Treatment is more cost efficient.

Position

The American College of Medical Toxicology believes that most poisoned patients can be appropriately managed by health care facilities meeting JCAHO standards for acute care services. However, victims of severe or unusual poisonings should be treated at a center for poison treatment, when regionally available. Proper care of patients with significant or ill-defined poisoning includes a consultation with a medical toxicologist.

References

8. American College of Medical Toxicologyâ€™s (ACMTâ€™s) Center for Poison Treatment Facility Assessment Guidelines.