
National Poisons Information Database

A “poison” can be defined as any substance that impairs health or destroys life when ingested, inhaled or absorbed by the body in relatively small amounts.

In Sri Lanka over 80,000 patients are admitted to state hospitals due to poisoning every year. In 2000, 2666 patients died of poisoning, and it was the fourth leading cause of death in state hospitals. Sri Lanka has one of the highest rates of suicide in the world, as a result of nearly two thousand deaths caused by ingestion of liquid pesticides. Thus, current information about poisons and the management of poisoning is essential. Physicians or any doctor for that matter should find information about poisoning and its management easily available in the emergency setting.

A book on “Management of Poisoning” written by Professor Ravindra Fernando, Head of the National Poisons Information Centre, Sri Lanka, is available and it is freely distributed among doctors under the patronage of the National Poisons Information Centre.

However, with the dawn of the new millennium, “e-knowledge” has become a buzzword. Addressing this issue, Kelum Pelpola and Taraka Perera, two medical students of the AL 2000 batch of Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo, have designed a compact disk which was geared to greet the new information age with accuracy, efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

The compact disk brings to light some innovations. *The opening menu:* the main menu is divided into five sections namely, animal poisons, plant poisons, household and industrial chemicals, drugs and agro chemicals and enables easy access from the opening page. Users outside the medical field can also access data in a more systematic way.

Detailed and emergency sections: two sections have been introduced for every entry of poisoning. The “emergency” section includes clinical features and management only, while the detailed section has more information about the poison including research articles whenever possible.

Search page: the search page contains basic instructions on how to perform a search. Following the search, pages appear indexed according to priority, where the first entry denotes the most relevant page for the searched word.

Image gallery: this currently contains images of related animals and plants. It will be further updated in the future.

This compact disk is an excellent learning and reference tool by undergraduates as well as medical professionals. It would also enable the medical professionals in Sri Lanka to refer the information on poisons and its management with efficiency and ease. It can also be reproduced easily and updated with minimal hassle. The cost will not be an issue since a compact disk can be produced with a total cost of around Rs.40/=.

Another advantage, especially in the Sri Lankan setting, is that the technical requirements are minimal.

The compact disk was created in a format that could be converted into a website. That website was launched recently and can be accessed at www.npid.tk. The website functions as the official site of the National Poisons Information Centre. It is the first of its kind in South Asia. And comprehensively deals with management of poisoning.

The site also has a “forum” where anybody who is interested in the topic of management of poisoning can have discussions about the major issues, newest developments etc. Registration at the site and forum could be done by visiting www.npid.tk. The registered members would be constantly updated regarding the new developments and other major important issues in management of poisoning in Sri Lanka.

The compact disk and the website were launched as the “National Poisons Information Database” at the inauguration of the 5th Asia Pacific Toxicology Conference held in Sri Lanka on the 6th of August 2006 where Hon. Nimal Siripala de Silva, Minister of Health, was the Chief Guest.

