

## **POISON PREVENTION EDUCATION IN CAYMAN BRAC, CAYMAN ISLANDS**

Dhallchand Seeram Rph

*“And forth he goes—no longer he would tarry—  
Into the town unto a ‘pothecary  
And prayed him that he would sell  
Some poison, that he might his rattes quell...”*

In May 2000, two high school students on work-link at the Faith Hospital, Cayman Brac, observed that in the pharmacy were many poisons and they were not interested in a career that involved dispensing poisons. This apparent negative statement gave Dhallchand Seeram, the pharmacist, two important tasks. He started a Poison Prevention Education programme immediately, and enhanced the public image of the pharmacist through education and participation in Health Care activities in schools and in the community. The first assignment for the students was to explain what a poison is and identify poisons in and around the home. Students learnt that all substances are poisons and it is the dose that will help or harm the patient. They also learnt that pharmacists are trained professionals who ensure that patients receive the best medication related care.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> April 2001, the first Poison Prevention Day on Cayman Brac was launched at the Stake Bay Public Library. The activities were based on Poison Prevention Week in the USA and under the theme “Children Act Fast, So Do Poisons”. Over the past 11 years ongoing lectures and discussions by the pharmacist, officers from the pesticides committee, the fire service and environmental health, and students’ participation in the visual and performing arts to raise awareness of poisons in our environment, contributed significantly to children’s education and reduced the incidence of poisoning on the Brac. Every year a different topic is discussed and children are awarded for their efforts at the poster competitions and other activities.

Children and parents are more aware now that if medicines or other chemicals are not stored properly and out of reach from children, then toddlers are pre-exposed to items that could cause harm. Children also learnt what to do in a poison case for a patient or pet that is exposed to a poison e.g. medication overdose, exposure to pesticides or poisonous plants, stings or other poisons and how to make a 911 call or call for assistance. Patients are also encouraged to clean up their medicines cabinets and return all expired and unused medicines and used insulin syringes to the pharmacy to be properly destroyed. This is an annual “Brown Bag” exercise that is done on Cayman Brac as part of Poison Prevention Education. Regulations in the Cayman Islands permit the Public Health Department to warn of contaminated food or drug and issue instructions for such items to be removed from the shelves based on evidence of post-exposure.

In May 2006, Cayman Brac, on invitation from CARPIN based in neighbouring island Jamaica, participated in a poster competition based on the theme “Poison. Out of Reach is Out of Danger”. The students in all age groups from kindergarten to secondary level did

exceptionally well and were the proud recipients of cash, plaques and certificates from CARPIN. They continue to receive awards annually at the CARPIN poster competition not only for themselves but their schools also received each a copy of the book “Poisonous Plants of Jamaica” and posters of Poisonous Plants which are found in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands.

In August 2007 at the CAP conference held in Grand Cayman, D. Seeram RPh in his presentation on common poisons in the Cayman Islands explained the role of the pharmacist in poison prevention education and continues to call all pharmacists to make a more meaningful contribution in this area. Poison Prevention Day/Week is not yet a national event in the Cayman Islands. “We don’t accomplish anything in this world alone .....whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one’s life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another ..” Supreme Court Justice, Sandra Day O’Connor.

The goal to provide meaningful participation in poison prevention activities among all students on the Brac is achieved and maintained through voluntary contributions from the pharmacist and other educators, CARPIN, gifts, donations and monetary contributions from sponsors such as the Rotary Club of Cayman Brac, Health Services Authority, LIME, Digicel and Kirkconnell Supermarket and most importantly the cooperative efforts from the principals and art teachers, parents and students on the Brac. The secret to the survival of this programme for the past 12 years is to keep it simple and only “bite what you can chew”.

“Let us work together to make poison prevention education free and easily accessible to all Caribbean”.

*Dhallchand Seeram- Poison Prevention Co-ordinator – Cayman Brac.*

