

Summary/learning points

- routine screening of all patients with acute poisoning for toxic plasma paracetamol concentrations is unnecessary
- unrestricted availability of plasma paracetamol measurements results in an increase in the number of inappropriate requests

does contain paracetamol and not the salicylate found in the adult preparation.

We have now proposed guidelines on the use of the plasma paracetamol assay service in our medical unit and we hope to see a reduction in the number of inappropriate requests. The requirement to discuss the case with the duty

chemical pathologists and, perhaps, a clinical toxicologist is now being reconsidered. Such an arrangement also has the advantage of a team approach, particularly in the management of patients with severe poisoning. A comprehensive list of drugs or herbal (patent) medicines containing paracetamol should be readily available to the admitting physicians. Such information is always available from our 24-hour Drug and Poisons Information Bureau in Hong Kong.⁵

We have not included the smaller number of non-Chinese subjects (eg, Vietnamese) encountered in this study to avoid the possible confounding factor of the language barrier. Future studies should examine the appropriate as well as inappropriate uses of other drug assays in patients with acute poisoning.

- 1 Chan TYK, Critchley JAJH, Chan MTV, Yu CM. Drug overdose and other poisoning in Hong Kong – the Prince of Wales Hospital (Shatin) experience. *Hum Exp Toxicol* 1994; 13: 512–5.
- 2 Chan TYK, Chan AYW, Ho CS, Critchley JAJH. The clinical value of screening for paracetamol in patients with acute poisoning. *Hum Exp Toxicol* 1995; 14: 187–9.
- 3 Ashbourne JF, Olson KR, Khayam-Bashi H. Value of rapid screening for acetaminophen in all patients with intentional drug overdose. *Ann Emerg Med* 1989; 18: 1035–8.

4 Prescott LF, Illingworth RN, Critchley JAJH, *et al.* Intravenous N-acetylcysteine: the treatment of choice for paracetamol poisoning. *BMJ* 1979; 2: 1097–100.

5 Chan TYK, Critchley JAJH, Chan JCN, *et al.* The Drug and Poisons Information Bureau at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. *J Hong Kong Med Assoc* 1993; 45: 202–5.

6 Chan TYK, Critchley JAJH, Chan AYW. Renal failure is uncommon in Chinese patients with paracetamol (acetaminophen) poisoning. *Vet Hum Toxicol* 1995; 37: 154–6.

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CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS 30 November 1995