

A Day in the Life of a SPI at Wisconsin Poison Center

"Hello, this is Maggie, RN, at Wisconsin Poison Center. How may I help you?"

Thus begins another call to Wisconsin's only poison center. The Wisconsin Poison Center (WPC) handles poison-related calls from across the state 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Examples of the types of calls the WPC manages include questions and exposures related to medications, chemicals, inhalations, vaping or street drugs, snake bites and plants.

At the WPC a Specialist in Poison Information (SPI) may be a registered nurse or pharmacist who has been trained in toxicology. A SPI is a very interesting role that requires critical thinking and a specialized knowledge-base. The SPI is required to become board certified as a Certified Specialist in Poison Information (CSPI) after managing a specified number of human exposure calls and after completing a specified number of work hours. The WPC provides dedicated education sessions to help SPIs prepare for the certification exam.

SPI's/CSPI's work with a great deal of autonomy. They must be ready to make assessments independently, and are given full responsibility for managing calls using approved treatment guidelines paired with exceptional clinical judgment skills. No two calls to the center are ever the same. Although there is a physician toxicologist available 24/7/365 to consult, the approved evidence-based practice guidelines written by our staff toxicologists help guide the SPI/CSPI when making recommendations to callers.

The feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment when SPIs/CSPIs have calmed a frantic mother or provided treatment guidelines for an overdose patient to an emergency department nurse cannot be paralleled. There is never a dull moment, and every call can be an opportunity for a SPI/CSPI to teach as well as learn.

Work-life balance is important at the WPC. In 2012, WPC piloted its first home workstations which allowed certified staff to work remotely. Since COVID, and as permitted by the America's Poison Centers', SPI/CSPI's have

the option to work a portion of their shifts at home once they complete orientation. The ability to work remotely increases staff satisfaction and is part of the Poison Center's emergency preparedness plan. Staff members are able to help cover shifts or portions of a shift if needed, when previously the shift may have been left unfilled. Wisconsin Poison Center is a program of Children's Wisconsin, and staff are employed by the health system.