

A ten-step quality assurance program for regional poison information centers.

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Authors: Pittsburgh Poison Center, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, PA 15213.

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Our regional poison information center (RPIC) has developed and implemented an ongoing quality assurance (QA) initiative, using performance indicators and evaluation thresholds to permit a planned and systematic process for monitoring the quality, appropriateness and effectiveness of service.

A 10-step QA plan was designed that included delineating the scope of care, identifying the most important aspects of care, identifying indicators and thresholds to monitor performance and outcomes, and establishing a formal medical audit review process to resolve questions and/or problems.

This QA program has resulted in verification of the validity of the RPIC's data and services. Threshold indicators (the incidence of accidental poisoning in children less than 6 y, incidence of intentional poisoning among children less than 18 y, appropriateness of home versus hospital management, and reduction in major/mortal outcomes in children less than 6 y) have all been successfully met during the past 12 mo. A medical audit committee objectively reviews and meets to discuss all unique poison exposures or those suffering major/mortal outcomes. Examples of identified problems include the lack of utilizing standard abbreviations during documentation and the need to standardize indications for consulting medical back-up.

RPICs are innovative health services with unique and increasing responsibilities and liabilities. A QA program, designed to objectively and systematically monitor and evaluate the quality and appropriateness of care rendered the poisoned patient, can improve care and resolve identified problems in a timely manner.

A formalized QA program is essential for all RPICs.