International Journal of Life Sciences, Biotechnology and Pharma Research Vol. 13, No. 11, November 2024 Online ISSN: 2250-3137
Print ISSN: 2977-0122

DOI: 10.69605/ijlbpr_13.11.2024.45

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Forensic role of antidotes in poisoning cases

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Received Date: 13 September, 2024 Accepted Date: 18 October, 2024

ABSTRACT

Background: This study investigates the forensic role of antidotes in poisoning cases, emphasizing their effectiveness and impact on patient outcomes. **Methods:** A prospective observational study was conducted over 11 months at Hi-Tech Medical College and Hospital, Bhubaneswar, involving approximately 100 patients presenting with various types of poisoning. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure relevant data collection. **Results:** Of the 100 patients, 85 (85%) achieved successful recovery following antidote administration. The study revealed that timely administration of antidotes significantly correlated with improved outcomes; 50% of patients received treatment within one hour of exposure. The most common types of poisoning involved pharmaceuticals (45%) and pesticides (30%). Statistical analysis indicated a significant association ($p < 0.01$) between antidote administration timing and patient recovery. **Conclusion:** The findings underscore the critical importance of timely antidote administration in enhancing recovery rates in poisoning cases. This study contributes to the understanding of antidotes in forensic toxicology, advocating for rapid assessment and intervention in clinical practice.

Keywords: Antidotes, Poisoning, Forensic Toxicology, Patient Outcomes

INTRODUCTION

A crucial area of toxicology and forensic medicine is the forensic use of antidotes in poisoning cases, which addresses the physiological effects of toxic substances as well as the actions required to lessen their effects [1]. Accidental or deliberate poisoning poses a serious problem for emergency medical care, law enforcement, and forensic investigations. Antidotes can be a matter of life and death, so efficient management and legal accountability must understand their identity, effectiveness, and position in the legal system [2,3]. Antidotes are specialized substances that block or neutralize the negative effects of toxins on the body. A vast range of antidotes, each specifically designed to treat certain toxicological profiles, are required due to the different natures of poisons, which include heavy metals, biological toxins, medicines, and pesticides [4]. The identification of the poison and the proper counteragent are essential for forensic investigations as well as therapy, as they might shed light on the conditions surrounding the poisoning episode [5].

Antidotes have a role in forensic contexts that goes beyond simple therapy; they can be crucial pieces of evidence in court cases. The availability of an antidote, when it is administered, and other factors can provide evidence of the poisoning's purpose, mode of action, and even the guilt or ignorance of those responsible [6,7]. In addition, forensic examination of antidotes and their combinations with poisons can provide important insights into the toxicity mechanisms, facilitating the creation of more efficient treatment plans and improving our knowledge of the dynamics of poisons [8]. The significance of countermeasures in poisoning instances is emphasized by the convergence of toxicology, pharmacology, and forensic research. This introduction lays the groundwork for a thorough examination of the role antidotes play in the field of forensic toxicology, their applicability in legal proceedings, and the continuous developments in antidotal therapies that adapt to new and developing toxic dangers [9,10]. By studying case studies, dissecting forensic techniques, and comprehending the pharmacodynamics of antidotes, we can obtain a thorough grasp of their crucial function in the intricate field of poisoning and forensic science [11].

The purpose of this study is to investigate the forensic use of antidotes in poisoning cases, including their efficacy, modes of action, and potential consequences for legal investigations. To improve management and responsibility in poisoning occurrences, the study

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aims to better awareness of the significance of various antidotes about certain toxins in both clinical and forensic contexts.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This study employed a prospective observational design to assess the forensic role of antidotes in poisoning cases.

Number of Patients

A total of approximately 100 patients who presented with poisoning incidents were enrolled in the study. These patients were selected based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria, ensuring a diverse representation of various poisoning types.

Study Duration

The study was conducted over 11 months, from April-2024 to October 2024. During this time, data were systematically collected and analysed to evaluate the effectiveness of antidotes administered to the patients.

Study Place

The research was conducted at Hi-Tech Medical College and Hospital in Bhubaneswar. This facility provided a suitable environment for the study due to its comprehensive toxicology unit and access to a wide range of antidotes and treatment protocols.

Inclusion Criteria

The study included patients who met the following criteria:

1. Adults and children presenting with acute poisoning within 24 hours of exposure.
2. Patients who received specific antidotes as part of their treatment.
3. Individuals providing informed consent (or whose guardians provided consent in the case of minors).
4. Patients with a confirmed diagnosis of poisoning through clinical assessment and laboratory tests.

Exclusion Criteria

Patients were excluded from the study if they met any of the following criteria:

1. Chronic poisoning cases or those with a history of multiple poisoning incidents.
2. Patients who did not receive any antidote during their treatment.
3. Individuals with significant co-morbid conditions that could interfere with the study outcomes.
4. Patients whose poisoning was related to self-harm or suicide attempts, where ethical considerations prevented participation.

Data Collection

Patient data were collected through medical records, clinical assessments, and laboratory analyses. Information regarding the type of poison, time of exposure, antidote administered, and patient outcomes were documented meticulously.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed to evaluate the relationship between the administration of antidotes and patient outcomes. This analysis helped in identifying patterns and determining the effectiveness of various antidotes in different poisoning scenarios.

RESULTS

The study involved approximately 100 patients, with a demographic breakdown showing that the majority (65%) were adults aged 18-45 years. In terms of gender, there were 60 male patients (60%) and 40 female patients (40%), indicating a higher incidence of poisoning among males. The types of poisoning were categorized as pharmaceuticals (45%), pesticides (30%), heavy metals (10%), and others (15%), which included carbon monoxide, alcohol, and other toxic substances. Pharmaceuticals were the most common cause, with 45 cases involving prescription medications such as analgesics and antidepressants. Pesticide poisoning was primarily seen among agricultural workers, while heavy metal poisoning involved lead and mercury.

Antidote administration varied based on the type of poisoning. Naloxone was administered to 20 patients (20%) for opioid overdoses, while 30 patients (30%) received activated charcoal for toxic ingestions. Atropine was given to 25 patients (25%) for organophosphate poisoning, and acetylcysteine was provided to 15 patients (15%) for acetaminophen overdose. Other specific antidotes were administered to 10 patients (10%).

Regarding patient outcomes, 85 patients (85%) fully recovered after receiving the appropriate antidote. Ten patients (10%) showed partial recovery and required additional medical care, while five patients (5%) succumbed to poisoning, largely due to delayed presentation and severe toxicity. The timing of antidote administration played a critical role in recovery, with 50% of patients receiving treatment within one hour, resulting in better outcomes. Those treated within 1 to 6 hours had mixed results, while patients who received antidotes after 6 hours experienced poorer outcomes.

Statistical analysis showed a significant correlation between timely antidote administration and recovery rates ($p < 0.01$), emphasizing the importance of prompt medical intervention in poisoning cases.

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Table 1: Patient Demographics

Demographic Variable	Number of Patients	Percentage
Total Patients	100	100%
Age Group (Years)		
0-17	10	10%
18-45	65	65%
46-65	20	20%
66 and above	5	5%
Gender		
Male	60	60%
Female	40	40%

This table provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the study population, including age groups and gender distribution. The majority of patients were adults aged 18-45 years, with a higher incidence of poisoning observed among males.

Table 2: Types of Poisoning

Type of Poisoning	Number of Patients	Percentage
Pharmaceuticals	45	45%
Pesticides	30	30%
Heavy Metals	10	10%
Others (e.g., CO, alcohol)	15	15%

This table categorizes the types of poisoning experienced by the patients. Pharmaceuticals accounted for the largest proportion, followed by pesticide exposure, indicating the prevalence of these substances in the studied population.

Table 3: Antidote Administration

Antidote	Number of Patients	Percentage
Naloxone	20	20%
Activated Charcoal	30	30%
Atropine	25	25%
Acetylcysteine	15	15%
Other Antidotes	10	10%

This table outlines the distribution of antidotes administered to patients based on the type of poisoning. Activated charcoal was the most commonly used, reflecting its broad application in various toxic ingestions.

Table 4: Patient Outcomes

Outcome	Number of Patients	Percentage
Successful Recovery	85	85%
Partial Recovery	10	10%
Mortality	5	5%

This table summarizes patient outcomes following antidote administration. A high recovery rate (85%) was observed, underscoring the effectiveness of timely antidote treatment in poisoning cases.

Table 5: Time to Antidote Administration

Time Frame (Hours)	Number of Patients	Percentage
Within 1 hour	50	50%
1 to 6 hours	35	35%
After 6 hours	15	15%

This table details the time intervals between poisoning exposure and antidote administration. It shows that half of the patients received antidotes within the first hour, which correlated with better recovery outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The study's conclusions emphasize the vital role antidotes play in treating poisoning cases and the need for prompt intervention for bettering patient outcomes. The results are consistent with the literature that highlights the importance of prompt antidote administration in toxicological emergencies, as evidenced by the 85% recovery rate among patients who got the appropriate antidotes. The study's findings regarding the effectiveness of different antidotes are in line with earlier investigations. For instance, research by Dart et al. (2015) [12] found that naloxone administered promptly for opioid overdoses significantly decreased the death rate. The majority of the 20 patients in our study who got naloxone

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recovered well, confirming the antidote's efficacy in acute situations.

Likewise, research has validated the use of activated charcoal, which was given to thirty patients, showing that when given on time, it can effectively stop the absorption of poisons. The best time to administer activated charcoal is within an hour of intake, according to a meta-analysis conducted by Tong et al. (2010) [13]. This conclusion supports the timing of antidote administration in this investigation. The findings also show a significant relationship between patient outcomes and the timing of antidote administration. More specifically, within the first hour of exposure, 50% of patients received antidotes, which was correlated with a better percentage of recovery success. According to retrospective cohort research conducted by Kearney et al. (2018) [14], patients who got antidotes within the first hour of poisoning fared considerably better than those who faced delays. This conclusion is consistent with their findings. The necessity of prompt diagnosis and treatment in poisoning situations is highlighted by the critical window for antidote effectiveness.

The distribution of poisoning categories in this study is consistent with patterns seen in the general population, with medicines being the most common kind (45%). Comparable results were found in a Manogna et al. (2019) [15] investigation, which found that pharmaceutical drugs were implicated in most poisoning episodes, especially in metropolitan settings. According to a systematic review by Joshi et al. (2020) [16], the high rate of pesticide-related poisonings (30%) also reflects global concerns surrounding agricultural pesticides and their associated hazards. It is important to recognize the limitations of this study despite the encouraging results. The results generalisability may be limited by the single-center approach because regional variations in patient characteristics and poisoning patterns may exist. Furthermore, the study's observational design restricts the ability to conclude the effectiveness of particular countermeasures. Larger sample sizes in future multicentric research might strengthen the validity of these results [17,18].

CONCLUSION

As a result, this study's conclusion emphasizes the vital role antidotes play in managing poisoning cases and emphasizes how crucial prompt administration is to improving patient outcomes. The results underline the necessity for ongoing education and readiness in clinical settings to properly handle the problems posed by poisoning patients and add to the increasing body of information confirming best practices in toxicology.

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