ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center

An Interview with Tina Wismer

In this issue, we had a chance to talk to the Medical Director of the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (APCC), Tina Wismer, DVM, Diplomate ABVT & ABT. She is not only responsible for overseeing medical recommendations made by the veterinary staff, but is also highly involved in lecturing, making media appearances, and writing, as well as coordinating the APCC's externship program. After earning her undergraduate degree from Ohio's University of Findlay and DVM from Purdue University, she worked in small animal practice and emergency practice before joining the APCC. In addition to her duties at the APCC, she also works as an adjunct instructor for the University of Illinois and a consultant for VIN (Veterinary Information Network)—and enjoys maintaining her skills as a Master Gardener.

Tell us a little bit about the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center. What are its mission and goals?
Our mission is to assist both veterinarians and pet owners in helping animals that may have been poisoned. We are available to do this by phone 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We also maintain an electronic database that can be used to assess the seriousness of the situation and what treatments (if any) need to be implemented. Both our trained staff and the database are essential parts of preventing unnecessary deaths in animals. In addition to staffing the hotline, we author book chapters and give lectures to help educate veterinarians, veterinary staff, and pet owners concerning the treatment and prevention of poisonings.

How did you become involved with the Animal Poison Control Center?
It was almost by accident. I started off in a small animal daytime practice before moving into emergency medicine, and I really enjoyed the excitement of emergent situations. When there was a management shakeup at the emergency clinic, I saw a job advertised on VIN for the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center, and after discovering this position was also an alternative route for board certification in veterinary toxicology, I was sold! I worked as the overnight veterinarian at the organization for many years before moving to the medical director position.

What type of information can the Animal Poison Control Center provide to veterinary staff?
By determining the weight of the animal, the substance it was exposed to, and the time frame involved, we can predict what types of clinical signs can occur. Then we will make decontamination and treatment recommendations based on what we expect to see. We can also determine if the signs the animal is showing are related to the owner's concerns. Many veterinarians, when confronted with a tremoring animal (or one showing other clinical signs), will call us with a list of all the medications in the house to see if any are responsible for the pet's condition.

How can veterinary staff best make their clients aware of this center and its resources?
Placing our magnets or brochures in puppy or kitten kits or literature in the waiting room can let owners know we exist before they need us. We also have a free app that can help owners decide if something their pets ate could be a problem.

What do you see as one of the most concerning issues related to pets and poisonings?
Incorrect or incomplete information on the Internet can be problematic. For example, many websites instruct a pet owner on how to induce vomiting using hydrogen peroxide. However, many do not provide a correct dose (too much can cause hemorrhagic gastroenteritis or gas emboli) or do not give important restrictions ("Do not induce vomiting with caustic substances," or "Do not induce vomiting in a comatose animal"). It is important for pet owners to understand that accessing the proper information through an expert is the best way to ensure the safety of their pets. That is something we can provide.

Free Mobile App

The ASPCA APCC free mobile app provides a wealth of knowledge in the palm of your hand. Download the app at aspca.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/download-our-free-aspca-apcc-mobile-app