

Poison information and education at your finger tips

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THE 1990S HAS SEEN THE ADVENT of the Internet, enabling the easy sharing of information across the globe. In Malaysia, its usage is booming at an estimated rate of 20% a month. This will invariably escalate further with the development of the planned Multimedia Super Corridor by 1998.

At the same time, the profile of computer users are also changing with the increasing availability of personal computers at all levels of society. Computers too set the character of many work-places, places of learning and even homes.

Although the diffusion rate of the Internet among the general public is still low, the National Poison Centre (PRN) recognises that it is the way to create an information-rich Malaysia.

The PRN is now ready to share part of the Cyberspace and fulfill the new promise of the information superhighway to all Malaysians. This is also aimed at expanding info-communication in matters dealing with drugs, hazardous chemicals and various types of poisoning.

What is the Malaysian Drug & Poison Net (PRN-Net)?

The mission of the PRN-Net is to promote health in an information society and to provide information in a healthy society. Based on this, the objectives of the PRN-Net are :

- To be aligned with the mission of the PRN by maintaining a dynamic information environment.
- To complement all the services offered by the PRN via the Internet.
- To create awareness by making information accessible to all the networks globally.
- To provide national, regional as well as global gateways in health-related matters with emphasis on drugs and poisons.

The PRN-Net is envisioned to evolve into a global site for information on issues related to poisoning in particular, and health in general, in Malaysia. Towards this end it intends to create a virtual central database to function as a global repository of knowledge on the subject.

It can be accessed directly via the address: <http://prn.usm.my>; or via USM home page or Jaring under Malaysian World Wide site, Health & Medicine. It is open to all Internet users, particularly practitioners and educators.

This is yet another milestone for the PRN in trying to live up its mission: "To reduce the mortality, morbidity, accident and cost of poisoning with emphasis on excellence, compassion and innovation."

What can the PRN-Net offer?

The PRN-Net provides an up-to-date information not only about the activities of the PRN but also on poison-related issues in Malaysia and around the world. The PRN-Net also provides several unique and indigenous databases in the context of Malaysia.

Currently, it is also developing a section which carries information in the Malay language targeted at schoolchildren. In addition, it offers a programme for further education in clinical toxicology for health professionals.

The PRN-Net also serves as a global gateway to more than 50 related sites throughout the world. This will enable Malaysians to access these sites with relative ease and speed, and hence make it more economical. It is also more reliable since these sites have been evaluated by the PRN as dependable and of relevance to the field of toxicology. The PRN-Net is available 24 hours all year around.

How can the PRN-Net assist me?

There are a number of poisoning aspects that are of interest to the various components of the population. Most are regularly updated, and these include:

The Poisoned World

- This section represents a record of major poison-related events happening around the world. It is aimed at highlighting the fact that Mother Earth is in an ailing state, and her inhabitants are being insidiously poisoned. It looks back at all the "toxic" events that have unfolded in various parts of the world.

Under this section one can access information about events occurring in all the regions (Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Middle East) of the world and also incidents in individual countries of these regions. In 1995, more than 15 countries have been listed, and to date another five have been added. It is updated monthly and allows for contributions worldwide from any Internet user.

- **Traditional Malay Poisons**

This is the latest addition to the PRN-Net. It is aimed at providing comprehensive data as well as information regarding indigenous poisons in Malaysia, especially those of natural origins, and other infamous concoctions, charms and magic.

To date, it provides an alphabetical listing of poisonous plants (consisting of about 1,130 species), venomous snakes (consisting of about 50 pieces, with one sample page) and santau - an infamous local concoction.

Graphical and pictorial representations related to these are being currently prepared based on research and documentation activities of the PRN. Two sample pages are included for viewing, and more will be added in due course. A list of classical and modern references related to the subject are also being prepared so as to allow interested parties to access more information on the subject.

- **About the Net**

This is an electronic version of what has been explained above, except that it is interactive, being linked to the various sections of the PRN-Net.

- **PRN Emergency & First Aid**

This section provides information about the addresses as well as other contacts necessary during cases of emergencies. It is also linked to databases related to First Aid in a number of poisoning situations as a means for quick reference.

- **PRN Bulletins & Articles**

This section represents the electronic version of all the publications that originate from PRN, including an up-to-date compilation of all articles found in the bulletins of the Centre (*PRN8099* and *PenawaRacun*) as well as those in other printed media. All articles published in *Sun Healthtrack* since April last year can be accessed under this section. The section also archived all previous publications, and to date, more than 150 articles could be accessed electronically via the PRN-Net.

- **News & Health Info**

This section was started in October 1995, in the effort to capture all poisoning and health-related news reported in the Malaysian dailies, and at times other sources within the region. The news items are listed weekly for each month, and a summary of each item is also provided, together with their reference sources.

This is to enable users to gain access to the original news clippings that are kept under separate computerised databases in the centre. The aim of this section is to provide some insight to the events happening in the country, on a day-to-day basis. It serves as a reminder to Malaysians about the "state-of-poisoning" in the country at the end of each week.

International health-related news (including poisonings), notably that provided by the *New York Times Your Health Daily* and *Reuters' Health Information Services*, are also linked to this section. Link too are selected health-related news sites found in the Internet, for example, *Your Personal Health Information*.

- **Continuing Education & Meetings**

This section introduces the electronic version of Continuing Education on Clinical Toxicology (CECT) programme introduced through the professional bulletin of the centre, *PRN8099*, since last year.

Also enlisted are additional education programmes on toxicology and pharmacological emergencies provided by other web sites in the Internet. Another feature of this section is the link to a number of web sites which list a variety of international conferences and scientific events and meetings that are to be held as far as up to the year 2000.

This would be of interest to researchers and could facilitate their attendance and participation in such events. Some of these events listed are even conducted electronically.

- **PRN Consult**

Under this section, reviews of various poisonous substances are placed, aimed primarily to assist practitioners in the field. These reviews include discussions on the management and treatment in cases of such poisonings, as well as aspects of basic toxicology. Each review provides a quick reference guide based on the appropriateness to carry out emesis, lavage, charcoal treatment and antidotal support. To date, eight substances - drugs and other substances - have been reviewed and edited into the PRN-Net. More will be added every two months.

- **PRN Links**

This is a "global gateway" functioning especially as link to other web sites of significant interest to the PRN that are available in the Internet. This link aims to increase the speed of information sharing and exchange in carrying out its activities.

PRN has endeavoured to list only selected web sites under the various categories of Chemicals, Drugs, First Aid, Food, Hazards and Poisons. Another category labelled Pesticides & Environment is now being prepared to be added to the list. These will be further expanded to include Natural Toxins and Poisonous Plants. To date, more than 50 major web sites have been listed and this could benefit other users of the Internet interested in such matters.

- **PRN Index**

This section provides an index listing of all articles published by the PRN in 1995. It is an electronic version of PRN Index 1995 and will be updated annually. It aims to help users look for the relevant materials, via the Internet, published by the PRN. The index is based on the Library of Congress Classification Systems, 18th edition, 1995.

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