



The short course in toxinology: Training the trainers

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 November 2012

Received in revised form 4 March 2013

Accepted 7 March 2013

Available online 23 March 2013

Keywords:

Toxinology

Clinical toxinology

Training

Toxinology short course

ABSTRACT

Clinical toxinology is the medical discipline dealing with the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of toxin diseases caused by exposure to venomous animals and poisonous animals, plants and mushrooms. Currently there is no national or international organisation accrediting or training doctors in this discipline. A few courses covering some aspects of clinical toxinology exist, either with limited curricula, or with only a minor clinical focus, or with a very regional, non-global focus. The only comprehensive clinical toxinology course is the one provided in Adelaide, Australia, running regularly since 1997. Hundreds of doctors from many nations have attended the course since 1997. This course covers venomous animals, poisonous animals, plants and mushrooms, from a full global perspective, with an international faculty and an exit exam. Though lasting only one week, extensive pre-reading material is mandated. The current Course Handbook is about 500 pages. Emphasis is on clinically relevant information and is focused on the needs of doctors treating cases. While it is expected that attendees will have, or acquire, direct experience managing cases of toxin disease and will use the knowledge and skills gained in the course in direct patient care, they may also act as resource people in their home region/nation to promote increased skills in clinical toxinology amongst the wider medical workforce. This course may form the nucleus from which IST can develop a global accredited training scheme in clinical toxinology. Such a scheme will require input from diverse global regions and will be far more comprehensive and over a much longer time than the current Short Course, though likely will incorporate the Short Course in some way, or a derivative of it. Crown Copyright © 2013 Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Clinical toxinology can be defined as the specialised area of medical expertise covering the prevention, diagnosis and management of injuries from envenoming and ingestion of toxins of animal, plant, or mushroom origin. To date there is no specific medical professional/specialty/craft organisation for clinical toxinology and it is not a recognised subspecialty of any existing medical professional/specialty/craft organisation such as colleges or academies of emergency medicine or toxicology or internal medicine.

However, there is medical recognition in some countries of the need for expertise in clinical toxinology, in that toxinological emergencies are common in some regions, and it is considered an area of medical knowledge required in clinical toxicology and emergency medicine.

There are or have been a number of courses established to teach aspects of clinical toxinology, either as part of a broader toxinology course, or a specific clinical course (Table 1). Only one of these appears to have a prime clinical focus and a comprehensive global scope, the Adelaide-based Clinical Toxinology Short Course. The other courses are all either local in scope, restricted in scope, or with a non-clinical emphasis. Therefore this paper will focus on experiences with the Adelaide course, explaining the origins, scope, teaching methods, and related matters for this course.

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Table 1

Present and past courses in clinical toxinology.

Name of Course	Host country and (language used)	Scope of course	Current status
Les Animaux Venimeux et Veneneux: Systematique, Biologie, Toxicologie	France; Natural History Museum, Paris (French)	Covers venomous animals, terrestrial & marine, globally, with an emphasis on venoms/toxins, research, biology/taxonomy. Course runs over 3 non-consecutive weeks. Clinical components <20% of time. Course structure predominantly didactic lectures. No exit exam.	Course has run annually since 1981 For details contact: Christine Rollard email chroll@mnhn.fr
Clinical Toxinology Short Course	Australia; Women's & Children's Hospital and University of Adelaide, Adelaide (English)	Covers venomous & poisonous animals, poisonous plants & mushrooms, globally, with a strong clinical emphasis, though discussing venoms/toxins, biology/taxonomy as well. Course runs over 6 days. Clinical components >80% of time. Course structure uses didactic lectures, clinically evolving problems, practical sessions. There is an exit exam.	Course has run regularly every 2 years since 1997. Original courses were split into International and Australian focussed courses, but these were melded into a single course from 2005 onwards. For details contact: Julian White email julian.white@adelaide.edu.au
Swiss Toxinology Course	Switzerland; Swiss Tropical Institute (now the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute), Basel (English?)	Details not available, but apparently dealt with venomous animals only. Course run over 3 days. Clinical component unknown (likely at least 50%) Details regarding assessment are unavailable.	Uncertain how many times the course ran. Discontinued.
Brazilian Toxinology Course	Brazil; CEVAP, Botucatu (Portuguese)	Details not available, but focused on Brazilian venomous fauna, terrestrial & marine & poisonous flora. Course length, clinical component unknown. Details regarding assessment are unavailable.	Current status uncertain.

2. The Adelaide course

2.1. A brief history

The Adelaide-based Clinical Toxinology Short Course was first held in November 1997 at the Women's & Children's Hospital (WCH). The first course was devised and run by Associate Professor John Williamson (Royal Adelaide Hospital Dept. of Anaesthesia & Intensive Care) and Dr. Julian White (Toxinology Dept., WCH) and covered global venomous and poisonous fauna, but with a clear Australian focus. The faculty was largely Australian, but included several international experts from overseas (see Table 2). The emphasis was clinical, with a mixture of didactic lectures, clinical scenarios (clinical evolving problems; CEPs) and practicals/workshops. To test attendees learning from the course there was an exit exam on the last day. The course ran over 5 days. The target audience was exclusively medical practitioners, mostly from emergency medicine, intensive care, toxicology and rural medicine. This first course had 30 places and was fully subscribed. The course fees covered the costs of running the course, including bringing in faculty from around Australia and overseas.

Feedback from attendees at the 1997 course was very positive and a second course was scheduled for January 1999, but now split into 2 courses, a full international

course (longer), and an Australian-focused course (shorter), with optional poisonous mushrooms and poisonous plant modules. Funds were sought from AUSAid to assist doctors from developing nations to attend. This suite of courses, in 1999, introduced a printed Course Handbook, of about 230 pages.

Again feedback from attendees was positive and a third suite of courses was scheduled for 2001, then again in 2003, the latter coinciding with the World Congress on Toxinology being held in Adelaide.

From 2005 onwards, continuing to the present (most recent course, February 2012), the split courses and optional sub-courses were all combined into a single comprehensive course, covering venomous animals and poisonous animals, plants and mushrooms, globally, without a specific Australian focus, though fully covering the relevant Australian fauna.

The Course Handbook progressively grew in size, such that by 2005 it was in 2 volumes, with 400 pages. Thereafter the Course Handbook was supplied in electronic form only and for 2012 was over 500 pages.

The course length was progressively shortened from 2005 onwards, to reflect the difficulty for most doctors to take more than a week off to attend a training course. More emphasis was placed on teaching through the interactive clinically evolving problems with a concomitant decrease

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