The overall impact of the HERCULES program will be determined by the increase in the number and types of calls made to the Poison Control Center as compared to baseline data collected prior to the implementation of the program. Through this unique partnership between the Poison Control Center and county Extension educators, there will be a reduction in unnecessary complications and deaths due to poisonings in Tennessee.

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Agricultural Extension Service, Charles L. Norcross, Dean.
The grant project name is HERCULES: Health Education in Rural Communities Using Laptops in Educational Settings. The purpose of the HERCULES program is to develop a telecommunications network linking the UT Poison Control Center, the UT College of Pharmacy and the UT Agricultural Extension Service throughout the state of Tennessee.

These two grants represent the first two steps in a 3-year project designed to develop a technology-based program to decrease the impact of poisonings on the health of Tennesseans. In 2002, the first grant ($459,295) has been implemented in 26 counties, 3 District Offices, the State Extension Office and the Poison Control Center. The second grant ($490,012) is funding a network of 35 counties, another District Office and the College of Pharmacy Continuing Education Office during 2003. A third grant is being applied for to complete the telecommunication network in the remaining 34 counties in 2004.

The grant project name is HERCULES: Health Education in Rural Communities Using Laptops in Educational Settings. The purpose of the HERCULES program is to develop a telecommunications network linking the UT Poison Control Center, the UT College of Pharmacy and the UT Agricultural Extension Service throughout the state of Tennessee.

This will be accomplished by:

1) Providing in-depth training to county Extension educators about poisonings, their prevention and treatment and the resources of the Poison Control Center.
2) Providing each county with a laptop computer, web cam, portable multi-media projector, printer, laminator, and exhibit board for Extension professionals to use in their education programs.
3) Training county Extension educators to use the technology in order to more effectively reach their communities with poison prevention education.
4) Establishing a video conferencing network at the district offices, Poison Control Center, College of Pharmacy and State Extension office for training and program updates for county Extension educators with the expertise and resources of the Poison Control Center.

Two telecommunication grants have been awarded to The University of Tennessee (UT) Center for Community-based Health Initiatives (CCBHI) from the Rural Utilities Service of USDA. UT CCBHI is a partnership between the UT Agricultural Extension Service in Knoxville and the UT College of Pharmacy in Memphis.

Funding

Purpose

The Health Issue

Training Program

Poison Control Centers across the United States are an underutilized community resource. Most poisonings are unintentional and preventable. Sixty-three percent of the poisonings involve children under age six. The home is the most common site. By increasing the use of Centers by the public, research has shown that the negative outcome of poisonings, including death and disability, can be avoided. With every dollar spent on accessing a Poison Control Center, seven dollars are saved in health care costs.

The Poison Control Center provides information on poisons and assistance in poisoning emergencies through a free 24-hour hotline (1-800-222-1222). Specially trained pharmacists and nurses respond to each call with a computerized poison information system and on-call consultants. For most poisoning emergencies, the Center assesses the risk to the victim, recommends first aid measures, refers victims to the appropriate health care facilities and monitors the care through a system of follow-up calls.

The need for health education is essential to alerting the public on how to poison proof their homes and to use the Poison Control Center toll-free number. By linking with the community education network of the UT Agricultural Extension Service, the role and resources of the Poison Control Center are promoted across the state.

The success of this program is dependent on the county Extension educators’ abilities to use the technology and access poison prevention education materials. A multi-disciplinary team of trainers with expertise in information technology, clinical toxicology, health education, communications and evaluation research are conducting the three-session training program totaling 36 hours of training. The content of the training program is directed by core professional competencies which consist of a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to effectively use the technology in educating the public about poison prevention.

The HERCULES program is web-based. Lesson plans, educational activities, exhibits, posters, publications, credible links on poison prevention and treatment are available on the HERCULES web site at http://fcs.tennessee.edu/ccbhi/hercules.htm