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## Brief Communications

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### A Most Memorable Experience

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I wish to share with the readers of your esteemed journal a few memorable moments from my recent visit to the Swedish Poison Control Centre at Stockholm.

**The Working Group for the INTOX Training Manual for Poison Control Centres (2008). Left row (from Tempowski. Head of the table: Hans Persson. Right row (from front to back): Wayne Temple, Rachida Be**



I was one of the experts invited by the World Health Organization, Geneva to help develop a Training Manual for Poison Control Centre personnel, the first meeting for which had been held in Germany in 2004, and the second one was organized at Stockholm from 16 to 18 June this year. It was one of the most fulfilling trips of my life, though I normally dislike travel (and especially international travel because of all the emigration and other hassles). Even though the journey itself was taxing with 3 flight changes (Cochin-Chennai-Frankfurt-Arlanda) taking up a total time of nearly 24 hours, it was all worth it at the end. In my limited experience of international travel with only Colombo, Bangkok, Jakarta, and Singapore as prior destinations visited, I would still rate Sweden as the most beautiful country, and the Swedes as the most gracious and cultured people. Stockholm was straight out of this world with spick and span streets unclogged with traffic, architecturally sublime buildings, wondrous greenery, crystal clear lakes and the beautiful Baltic Sea, impeccably attired and polite people, children looking like animated Barbie dolls, and a total lack of ugly skyscrapers and industrial structures. In fact, I believe, Sweden is among the least polluted countries in the world.

The Swedish Poison Information Centre (referred to as Giftinformationscentralen in Swedish) located in the historical Karolinska Institute from where the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine is decided, is state-of-the-art, with spacious, airconditioned rooms occupying 2 floors of a separate building, and mind boggling information resource facilities on toxicology. It is an autonomic unit of the National Corporation of Swedish Pharmacies, and was started in 1960.

**Picture of the sunset over Lake Malaren at 10 PM (!) taken by Professor Pillay from Hans Persson's ap**
**time (right up to midnight and beyond). And then the sun rises again at about 4 AM! [Please click pictur**



The Centre is staffed by 32 full-time employees: 5 physicians, 23 pharmacists, 3 administrative personnel and 1 computer technician. The main responsibility of the pharmacists is the telephone service. An internal education and training period of three to six months is required before new pharmacists are allowed to answer telephone calls on their own. The physicians, specialized in anaesthesiology, intensive care and clinical toxicology are responsible for providing accurate medical information. They also practice within the ICU on a regular basis. The main responsibility of the Centre is to inform about risks, symptoms and treatment in cases of acute poisoning. The service is on a twenty-four hour basis and connected to the national alarm number, 112. Inquiries are received from hospitals and physicians as well as from the general public. The only (crucial) lack that I noticed was the absence of an analytical facility, which made me feel secretly superior for scoring over such a fantastic Centre on at least one count!

The faculty at the Centre were exceedingly gracious, and meetings were held (chaired by Ms. Joanna Tempowski of the WHO Geneva) in a lovely little conference hall, in a most cordial and intellectually stimulating manner that is inconceivable in a country like India, where most such meetings would be hijacked by a voluble minority (usually those with king-sized egos, and not necessarily those with much substance between the ears), while the remaining participants would be reduced to mute puppets. The Working Group for the training manual discussion at Stockholm comprised (apart from myself, Ms. Joanna, and the Swedish Poison Centre professionals), toxicologists from the UK, New Zealand, Africa, and the Philippines. After 3 days of chewing the rag to bits, we could finalize 5 very important chapters of the manual. The remaining chapters will be dealt with at subsequent meetings at other venues, as decided by the WHO.

...The piece de resistance of the entire trip was the dinner that Prof Hans Persson (a distinguished senior faculty member of the Centre, and incidentally my lead collaborator on the chapter on Poisonous Plants for the Oxford Textbook of Medicine) hosted on the second evening. I shall never forget the experience...

Anyway I felt vindicated sitting with some of the giants of toxicology, and being an active participant in the creation of an international manual. All these years of hard work have not gone in vain.

The piece de resistance of the entire trip was the dinner that Prof Hans Persson (a distinguished senior faculty member of the Centre, and incidentally my lead collaborator on the chapter on Poisonous Plants for the Oxford Textbook of Medicine) hosted on the second evening. I shall never forget the experience. Prof Persson's apartment is located on the 4th floor of a fabulous building that overlooks the serene Lake Malaren. We had the choicest of white and red wines, delectable food (served by the graceful Ms. Elise Persson), interspersed with stimulating discussions on classical music, opera, theatre, and films, the whole thing finally being rounded off with Prof Persson playing a few classical pieces on his grand piano. What more can one ask for by way of relaxation?

As I said, a most memorable experience.
Contact Dr. Pillay by clicking here

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