How much do adults know about children's paracetamol?

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Abstract
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Background: Over-the-counter children’s paracetamol formulations are commonly purchased to relieve symptoms of pain and/or fever. Even though paracetamol is safe and effective to use in children, it can cause adverse events when given as an overdose or in doses which exceed the recommended daily dose for several days. The aim of this research was to investigate adults’ knowledge about how to safely administer paracetamol to children.

Methods: Adults (≥18 years of age) who had purchased the popular Children’s Panadol™ brand of paracetamol were asked to complete an online survey, which assessed their knowledge about the product active ingredient(s), the recommended daily dosage and potential adverse effects associated with unintentional overdosing. The online survey was promoted via Facebook and three parenting forums, in September and October 2015.

Findings: Almost all of the 174 respondents were female (n=163, 93.7%), with a mean age of 36 years. The majority of them were well-educated (n=150, 86.2%) with adequate functional health literacy levels (n=149, 85.6%). While the vast majority of them correctly identified that Children’s Panadol™ contained paracetamol (n=168, 96.6%), a quarter of respondents did not know the maximum daily dose (n=46, 26.4%), just under half didn’t know how many days in a row that this dose could be safely given (n=80, 46%), and over a third (n=65, 37.4%) didn’t know that liver toxicity could result from overdose.

Discussion: Despite being a highly educated sample, these findings suggest adults administering paracetamol formulations to children have gaps in their knowledge which could predispose children to experiencing adverse effects. It is important therefore, to address this issue by targeting a number of strategies which could include: improving communication between all health professionals and consumers; improving product package labelling; and improving media coverage about the potential adverse effects associated with incorrect dosage of paracetamol in children.