

Debbie Woelfel of AMH named to State Poison Advisory Board

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ALTON – The Illinois Department of Public Health is pleased to appoint Debbie Woelfel, RN, MS, the Emergency Medical Services Coordinator at Alton Memorial Hospital, to serve as a member of the Illinois Poison Advisory Board.

As a member of this task force, Woelfel will be representing the state in an advisory capacity regarding the regulation of regional poison control centers that fall under the Poison Control System Act. Woelfel is required to participate in annual ethics training under the State Officials and Employees Ethics Act by May 4.

“It is a great honor to be named to the advisory board,” Woelfel said. “Since 2001, the IPC has partnered with hospitals such as Alton Memorial to integrate poison prevention education into their programs and services.”

Woelfel has been Alton Memorial’s Southern Illinois volunteer satellite education partner for the past 10 years, covering Madison, St. Clair, Monroe and Clinton counties.

March is Illinois Poison Prevention Month, and March 20-26 is National Poison Prevention Week.

Each year, U.S. Poison Centers receive more than 4 million poisoning exposures calls. The Illinois Poison Center (IPC) handles more than 80,000 calls annually via its **free**, confidential helpline (1-800-222-1222). Of those calls, almost half last year involved children 5 years of age and under but the most serious cause involved an adult. Calls come in from people exposed to a variety of substances that can be potentially harmful, such as medications, vitamins/supplements, plants, household chemicals, automotive products, insect/animal bites and stings, lead, and carbon monoxide.

In Illinois, there are more people hospitalized for poisonings than for injuries from firearms and motor vehicle collisions combined. Nine out of 10 poisoning deaths are caused by drugs or medications

Medical professionals throughout Illinois turn to the IPC for specialized consultation services in the management of poisoned patients. In fact, health care professionals called the IPC on 21,310 poisoning cases in 2014 alone. Calls from health care professionals have increased more than 50 percent in the past decade.

By providing treatment advice over the phone, the IPC experts managed 90 percent of the poison exposure calls at the site of exposure, eliminating the need for a referral to a health care facility.

The IPC saves lives and improves patient care by working with hospitals in Illinois to provide expert medical recommendations to health care providers treating patients exposed to potentially harmful substances. In addition, the IPC saves the people of Illinois \$52 million annually by preventing unnecessary 911 calls and visits to a doctor or hospital and decreasing (by an average of one day) the length of a hospital stay for poisoned patients admitted to the hospital.