DIAGNOSIS OF MERCURY USE IN HEALTH CARE CENTRES IN URUGUAY

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Abstract: Mercury is a toxic metal, liquid in its elemental form that volatilizes readily at ambient temperature exposing workers or patients at health care centres to potentially highly toxic levels. The US EPA ranks the health care sector as the fourth largest source of mercury air emissions due to their contribution to medical waste incinerators being then an important source of exposure of general population. In Uruguay there is no systematic study about this issue. The aim of this investigation is to learn about the use of mercury products at Health Care Centres in Uruguay as a basis to promote changing to safer alternatives. The survey includes a questionnaire regarding staff education towards toxic effects of mercury, existence or not of mercury disposal programs and hospital policies promoting best management practices for handling, recycling and disposing mercury containing products, training courses at health facilities, etc. It is carried out in two important maternal hospitals including health staff and housekeeping personnel. It includes a workshop for diffusion of the results obtained. Most health staff is not aware of toxic effects of mercury. There is no pre or post graduate training courses and few programs promoting good handling practices. It was demonstrated that to achieve changing to new alternatives, education and participation of health staff is essential. Many countries have realized the importance of using non mercury alternatives in health care centres. Our investigation group pretends to promote these changes in Uruguay with scientific data.