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Editorial

Deliberate self-harm with chemicals; ingestion of fabric stain removers, agrochemicals etc.

Circumstances leading to the ingestion of chemicals with the intention of causing deliberate self-harm are variable. In this issue of the *GMJ*, Gunathilaka and Abeywickrama report on a case of ingestion of a fabric stain remover (*Prinso*) together with a herbicide and its consequences including acute kidney injury and toxic leukoencephalopathy. They describe in detail the medical problems faced by the patient and how they were sorted out.

The case report discusses the ramifications of ingestion. In these situations, subjects can have major organ damage with significant residual effects. On the other hand, they will succumb with late arrival in hospitals or despite adequate management. Sri Lanka occupies a prominent position in global suicides rates, with a 14.6 suicides per 100,000 population in 2019 (World Bank).

The post-ingestion treatment is tedious. A discussion about the medical management brings out interesting and key clinical learning points. Is the remedy to ban these fabric stain removers and essential agrochemicals?

The prevention of deliberate self-harm is the most important remedial measure. We need to go into the root causes of deliberate self-harm - it goes beyond the realm of clinicians. The background is multifactorial with social, economic and individual problems. There need be focused measures taken by all responsible groups - at a macro level, the political leadership, economic policy makers, health sector planners and health workers at all levels need to focus on issues. At an individual level, vulnerable subjects need to be picked up by the respective families, peers, the community health and psychiatric teams and precipitating and background problems adequately addressed.

We all need to get together to prevent deliberate self-harm and bring down our position in the global league table of suicides!

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