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François Wuyts, IT Coordinator at the Belgian Poison Center (Belgisch Antigifcentrum – Centre Antipoison Belge)



When people's lives depend on correct data
Belgian Poison Center relies on SAS



Business Issue

Improving data quality



The mission of the Belgian Poison Center (Belgisch Antigifcentrum / Centre Antipoison Belge) is literally to save people's lives. In order to do that, it needs data which is complete, accurate and utterly trustworthy. Since the data is often used— among its many other applications—to support individuals by phone, it must be clear, concise and responsible. When someone may be suffering from acute poisoning at that very moment, the quality of this data can literally save lives. Poison Center has switched to SAS to fulfill their data needs.

Poison Center is available 24/7 by telephone to provide first-line information on acute poisoning. This government supervised organization processes more than 56,000 calls per year from the public. The center also maintains a considerable stock of antidotes which can be used in the event of an emergency. In addition, the center delivers statistical information to the Ministry of Health, the press, etc. and collects data about household products, biocides, pharmaceuticals, etc. that are sold within the country. The center is also responsible for reports on CO (carbon monoxide) intoxication, among other things.

The paper era

Poison Center employs 30 people, of which 13 are physicians. "The physicians manning the telephone lines are extremely well-versed in dealing with potential poisoning emergencies. Once they have solved the emergency, they then write down the information from every call on paper call sheets," explains François Wuyts, IT coordinator at Poison Center.

These call sheets are then scanned several times a week. Despite the advanced OCR (Optical Character Recognition) techniques employed, the typical doctors' handwriting is often difficult to read correctly. This of course can lead to errors in the data being recorded subsequent to the emergency. Another problem is that when the call sheet is written, the toxic substances which are the subject of the call are not always clearly connected to specific products in the database, making it troublesome to use the data to generate trustworthy statistics.

Solution

SAS® Visual Analytics

Benefit

- Faster and more accurate trend detection
- Better prevention campaigns
- Increased efficiency

“Such an approach is obviously outdated, which is why we are in the process of investigating a new system, probably CRM (Customer Relationship Management), enabling the doctors to fill in the call sheets electronically. In terms of data management, we have a lot of work to do,” adds François Wuyts.

Moving from MS Access to SAS

Initially, Poison Center used MS Access, driven by a number of smaller programs that were programmed by a physician working at the facility. As these programs were not dynamic, nothing could be changed without extensive reprogramming. That all began to change when François Wuyts started to use MySQL along with the necessary queries to make up statistical reports.

“Then I observed a comparative demonstration of several statistical software packages. I was immediately impressed by the capabilities of the SAS solutions. Shortly thereafter, we decided to contact SAS, who brought us into contact with SBI Consulting - a SAS partner - who helped us with the implementation.”

Dissolving grey data areas

When the SAS solution was operational, it became obvious that there were significant shortcomings in the database. For example, physicians were freely interpreting the distinction between voluntary and accidental intoxication, which obviously led to ‘grey areas’ in the data. Being able to identify these grey areas enables Poison Center to execute functional analyses of the new electronic system.

Quick access to data speeds up decision making

“All of the functionalities and features we need can be filled in with SAS. Simply put, SAS helps us to fulfill our mission in a far better and much more efficient way than ever before. When dealing with statistics, most of the time we simply need concrete figures from our data. Complicated statistical calculations are seldom needed. We need data such as the age categories of the victims who were poisoned by a particular product, or a particular drug in a certain period of the year. SAS enables us to have this information much more quickly. This in turn enables us to track developments and trends far faster and more accurately. This has been the basis for launching new, more appropriate prevention campaigns to protect the public.”

When asked if and how SAS makes life at Poison Center easier, Wuyts explains: “SAS helps us to make the data more transparent and shows us how to get the most from it. What we really appreciate is the powerful combination of the analytical and visual aspects of the software. SAS also provides solid accompaniment and intelligent suggestions by means of the Explorer module. So, does SAS makes life easier? Absolutely.”

