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Relevant Contents for Efficient Education in Travel Medicine

International migration has reached enormous proportions. Especially stays in tropical developing countries involve an enhanced risk to the health of travellers. Nowadays more than 75 million people travel from industrial countries to developing countries every year. This means a 50 % increase compared to 1993 (WTO 2004). From Germany only four million people travel to tropical developing countries every year and an increasing percentage of foreign citizens and visitors in Germany stem from tropical countries (German Statistical Office).

This is the reason why physicians in Germany and in other industrial countries are more and more confronted with problems of travel medicine, including diagnosis and treatment on the one hand and prevention on the other.

Patients suffering from imported diseases are usually treated by physicians with no experience in infectiology and tropical medicine. Therefore all practising physicians, in surgeries as well as in hospitals, should dispose of at least basic knowledge in this field.

In order to effectively prevent numerous travel and tropical diseases we have a broad selection of modern immunisations at our disposal. Travel medical consultation does not only cover vaccination and chemoprophylaxis but also information about major risks in the country of destination, information on relevant preventive measures including important advices on behaviour, and recommendations for the preparation of a first aid kit. An increasing number of travellers with chronic diseases or particularly risky or exposed behaviour continue to pose a special challenge for consultation in travel medicine (e. g. scuba divers, stays in great heights, trekking holidays, expeditions, long-term stays, business travellers, humanitarian helpers).

Unfortunately the teaching of travel medical knowledge is being neglected, formally and content-wise, during medical training and further education in Germany and in other industrialised

countries. Accordingly, lectures in tropical and travel medicine are only offered by very few of the 37 medical departments in Germany.

Non-stop learning and continuing education should go without saying for all physicians concerned with prevention and treatment of diseases in the field of travel medicine. There are plenty of possibilities for further education and qualification. In Germany the bulk of such education is made up of regular courses in travel medicine carried out according to the curriculum of the German Society for Tropical Medicine and International Health (DTG). These courses are offered by several course organisers (for a list see the DTG homepage: www.dtg.mwn.de) who follow a unified curriculum of 32 hours and a final exam (see http://www.dtg.mwn.de/wb/zr/zr_gk_c.htm). Every successful participant can obtain the DTG certificate of travel medicine. Owners of this certificate have the right to be included in the DTG list of certified physicians (http://www.dtg.mwn.de/wb/zr/liste_zr.htm) and in the publicly accessible list of the „FORUM Reisen und Medizin“ (www.frm-web.de), which serves patients who try to find physicians and institutions with experience in travel medicine in their vicinity. To keep the knowledge up to date and to further the education obtained in the basic course physicians are recommended to attend a nine-hour refresher course every three years. The curriculum of the refresher course can be found on the internet (www.dtg.mwn.de/wb/zr/zr_rk_c.htm).

The various courses offered worldwide are mostly held in English, but partly also in national languages. GOING INTERNATIONAL or the homepage of the International Society of Travel Medicine (ISTM) (www.istm.org) have published lists of relevant courses.

In the framework of the biennial world congress (CISTM) ISTM furthermore holds a multiple choice test known as the TRAVEL MEDICINE EXAMINATION (TME). All successful participants receive the Certificate in Travel Health (CTH). Moreover institutional members of ISTM can be listed in the „ISTM Directory of Travel Medicine Providers” as certified Travel Clinic (www.istm.org).

The next TME will take place in May 2005 during the CISTM VI in Lisbon. The body of knowledge has been published in the *Journal of Travel Medicine* (Volume 9 Number 2, 2002) or can be looked at on the internet (www.istm.org).

Apart from postgraduate training, which is covered by the above mentioned courses, continuous medical education and up-to-date information are of particular importance in the field of travel medicine because changes in regard to epidemiology, health risks relevant for travellers, new vaccines and drugs take place rather frequently. Regular updates and refresher

courses meet this demand. On the other hand the internet, as a quick and current source of information, has assumed an especially important role for all people working in travel medicine. Besides national sources of information (national public health authorities, national vaccination guidelines) the international health regulations by the WHO are of particular importance (Table 1). Finally, epidemiological information systems, such as ProMed (Table 2) have proven very useful and have contributed greatly to the rapid discovery of and current information about new health threats (e.g. SARS).