



Travel Medicine in Qatar: Strategic Action for Better Public Health Outcome



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Dear Editor,

The 21st century has witnessed exponential growth in the travel industry as well as the emergence and re-emergence of several infectious diseases, such as the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome.¹ Moreover, modern travel has eliminated spatial and temporal barriers, heightening the risk of global propagation of disease. Therefore, there is a need for balance between the health risks as well as the unique opportunities associated with travel, which is achievable through travel medicine.²

Despite the fact that pre-travel medical advice and post-travel medical care are vital for travelers' health, many do not pursue such services and are unaware of the health risks associated with their destination.

Primary care physicians, the travelers' first line of contact with the health system, must possess comprehensive knowledge of the dynamic epidemiology of travel-associated illnesses and the availability of new preventive or treatment measures.³ Most primary healthcare professionals portray a positive attitude towards giving travel-related health advice. However, such confidence must be fortified with appropriate knowledge and skills through certification programs, courses, or fellowships to build capacity and standardize the service provided.⁴ In the primary healthcare setting, the use of information technology in travel clinics has yielded good outcomes in terms of standardizing the care provided as well as guiding physicians and empowering their practice. However, the uptake of modern technologies does not eliminate the need for continuous professional development and health service evaluation.⁵

The Gulf Cooperation Council countries, including Qatar, witnessed a rapid modernization of life after the discovery of oil in the mid-1900s. Qatar is home to one of the fastest growing global airlines (Qatar Airways) as well as a large number of

expatriates (~88%), with an increasing number of its people involved in international travel.⁶ Moreover, a study assessing the knowledge and practice of primary healthcare providers in Qatar about travel medicine found that less than half of the participants (44.7%) offered travel-related advice, spending a mean time of 7 minutes per traveler.⁷ As Qatar ramps up efforts to host the FIFA 2022, supporting the country's full implementation of the Global Health Security Agenda is vital. Such event will require a situational analysis in order to ensure the adequate preparedness of the health system and all relevant stakeholders.⁸ Moreover, the influx of millions of visitors will pose a considerable risk of the importation of infectious diseases such as Zika, Ebola, diarrheal diseases, malaria, and sexually transmitted infections, making pre- and post-travel preventive measures a strategic approach for Qatar.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conception and implementation of the work.

Conflict of Interest Disclosures

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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