Impact of MDRTB cases among medical tourists in Singapore

APEC EINet Virtual Symposium:

Trade and travel related impacts on emerging infectious disease

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WHO Recommendations

Pretravel

- Physicians should inform **all infectious and potentially infectious TB patients** that **they must not travel by air** on any commercial flight of any duration until they are sputum smear-negative on at least two occasions

- Physicians should inform **all MDR-TB and XDR-TB patients** that **they must not travel by any commercial flight** – under any circumstances or on a flight of any duration – until they are proven to be non-infectious i.e. two consecutive negative sputum-culture results

- Physicians should **immediately inform the relevant public health authority** when they are aware that an infectious or potentially infectious TB patient intends to travel against medical advice.

Tuberculosis and air travel : guidelines for prevention and control – 3rd ed. "WHO/HTM/TB/2008.399"

Singapore Experience

Challenges faced when implementing WHO recommendations on medical tourists with MDRTB

- Medical tourists with MDRTB or later diagnosed to have MDRTB have arrived unannounced to seek medical treatment i.e. they would have flown on commercial flights to Singapore.

- Medical tourists with MDRTB should not be allowed to fly on commercial flights until they are proven to be non-infectious i.e. two consecutive negative sputum-culture results. Therefore, they will need to undergo treatment in Singapore till rendered non-infectious.

- However, medical tourists are often not prepared to remain in Singapore for extended periods of time (lack of social support and disruption to jobs and family).

Example

XDRTB patient from neighboring country

Possible solutions

- Medical evacuation – contingent on having a receiving facility able to treat patient

- Remote treatment – compliance with medication an issue

For Discussion

- Do other countries face similar difficulties?

- If yes, how do you manage such a case, preventing them from travel on commercial vessels?