

Chapter 14

Stress Relief across Borders

Tomiyo Fukagawa

Fukagawa Internal Medicine Clinic, Japan

ABSTRACT

People suffer from both mental and physical stresses. International and domestic travelers may need examination and treatment for their relief. The need to stay for a longer time abroad for mental health treatment may seem unusual or not common. However, stress relief across borders is both possible, and may be very well catered for, as in Japan. Stress relief methods and equipment in Japan are equal to those of other countries, and are available as national measures. In fact, Japan's breathing therapy systems and relaxation methods using the abundant hot springs have long been a tradition. In this chapter stress relief program choices are described, including those for medical tourism participants, and stress management is proposed as part of or support for other treatments. If such programs can resolve stress, then both the traveler and the destination will have achieved a positive outcome.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the contemporary stressed society! Our environments (natural, social and economic) are becoming more and more severe day by day. Original healthy living habits, which have benefitted Japan such that the population is currently one of the most long-lived in the world, have begun to suffer from the impact of declining economic growth, an aging society, alienation of young people, and similar stresses that are common in developed countries. It is well known that the biggest thing which undermines immunity is stress that we encounter every day, thus Countries, regions, municipalities, companies, and individuals are seeking stress relief (Bushell & Sheldon, 2009; Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). Concurrently, in a society like Japan the impacts of such stresses on the causes of disease have become clear. And, it is also obvious that tourists, often characterized as 'holiday makers' and therefore presumably in a less stressed frame of mind, are in fact quite often feeling stress in some form (Smith & Puczko, 2013). Living in frustration with changes in climate and lifestyle differences, treating anxiety and fear of unfamiliar lands or cities, considering future long-term residential and travel options, often become issues. This is not to say that perfect mental health for travelers is required or even desirable, but just to note that stress is a common feature of life today, even as a tourist (Erfurt-Cooper, 2013).

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There is however another class of traveler that may be suffering from higher levels of stress and, if they choose to travel to fight this stress, may be classed as *medical* tourists. This situation, and the growing number of such people, means that stress relief programs should be a part of medical tourism, in order to reduce participant's 'physical and mental fatigue'. Programs to reduce mental and physical fatigue and nervous tension are available in Japan and deserve inspection to further international knowledge and recognition of their good results. Stress amelioration utilizing the latest technology range from self-care of mental and physical relaxation in a natural environment, to Japan's traditional breathing methods, within well-developed stress relief programs.

People suffer from many different stresses, and are often in a state of tiredness that is both mental and physical, and a normal feature of everyday life. Thus people from foreign countries coming to Japan, as well as those domestic travelers moving from home to an internal destination, may need examination and treatment for the relief of stress. The need to stay long-term in a foreign country, do tests and have treatment for mental health and stress relief may seem unusual, and/or not very common, but nevertheless does exist. Stress relief methods and equipment in Japan are equal to those in other developed countries, and anti-stress measures are available as national measures in every location, along with the application of up-to-date medical science and technology that is available across the nation. Thus, stress relief across borders is both possible, and very well catered for in Japan. In fact, Japan's own breathing therapy systems and relaxation methods using the abundant hot springs have been a tradition used by travelers since ancient times (Erfurt-Cooper, 2013). In this chapter stress relief program choices are described, and stress management is proposed as part of other treatments or support for medical and other tourists based on experience gained in Oita Prefecture, Kyushu, Japan. On inspection, it is suggested that this form of medical tourism that is available in Japan should be marketed actively to both foreign and domestic travelers; treatment for stress will have a positive impact on some travelers, and may support many others. If such programs resolve stress, both physical and mental, then both the traveler and the destination will have achieved a positive outcome.

BACKGROUND

Stress Responses: Mind and Body

Stress and stress response is inevitable in our lives. Something may have happened in our living environment, or a new stimulus has to be coped with, or physical ill health may develop and, thus, all environments can become sources of stress for our minds and bodies, in addition to the "changes that happen inside myself also" (Watanabe, 2003, p. 47). Various reactions also cause stress to mind and body, and the process of adaptation to the stressors and stimuli from the outside must take these into the mind and body. This is particularly true in the area of medicine and the psychology of medicine, where reaction to stress can have very profound consequences. Biological stressors include internal factors, such as inadequate diet, lack of sleep, infections, bleeding, fatigue, and external environmental factors, such as changes in temperature, humidity and pressure, trauma, vibration, sound, light, radiation, and various toxic substances and gases as physical and chemical stressors. In the process of further care, managing advanced mental and physical activity and the impact of such stressors is essentially human, so in society we each play a role in attracting and dealing with personal, social or psychological stress factors, and are more or less stress-prone (Kuribayashi, 1995, pp. 22-23).

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