

# BON VOYAGE!

**Does running a travel clinic sound like an interesting possibility for the future? Pharmacist-run travel clinics are now being piloted. Dawn Connelly looks at what's involved**

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In 2006, UK residents made 68 million trips abroad. Most of these visits were to Europe but an increasing number of travellers are going to tropical destinations. Also in that year there were 1,754 cases of malaria diagnosed in people returning to the UK from malaria-endemic countries. Eight of these cases were fatal and most people had not taken the correct precautions needed for their visit.

Access to travel medicine services, immunisations and antimalarials varies throughout the UK. Caroline Hind, pharmacist facilitator in the pharmacy medicines unit at NHS Grampian, explains that this is true in Grampian, where GP travel services are variable and the local NHS travel clinic is oversubscribed. For this reason, the health board decided to investigate the demand for, and feasibility of, travel clinics run by community pharmacists. The resulting research project identified a need for additional services and a willingness of the public to attend a community pharmacy for these services. This led to a pilot study, launched in September 2006, in two community pharmacies within Grampian.

A number of pharmacists in the area were already participating in a successful NHS influenza immunisation scheme, so extending the service to include travel health was a natural next step, says Dr Hind.

Charles Michie is the proprietor of Michies The Chemist in Aberdeen, where one of the clinics is located. He has been running a flu vaccination

clinic in the pharmacy for the past five years. The pharmacy has one consultation room and two clinic rooms, which are larger and equipped with full-length couches in case people feel unwell after receiving a vaccination. In the basement there is a 100-seater coffee shop where patients are offered a complimentary drink so as to encourage them to stay on the premises for the required 15 minutes post-immunisation.

Mr Michie and his pharmacists run two clinics per week, with the option of additional bookings if a travel health qualified pharmacist is available. They see about 20 to 30 patients weekly and each is allocated a 30-minute appointment.

During the appointment, the customer's travel health risk is assessed with the aid of the Travax website ([www.travax.nhs.uk](http://www.travax.nhs.uk)) for health professionals. The pharmacist then decides what immunisations and antimalarials are required, and can provide or administer most of them immediately. The clinic is not licensed to administer yellow fever or Japanese encephalitis vaccinations and patients requiring these are referred to a doctor. Advice is also offered on bite prevention, personal hygiene, food and water, sun exposure, sexual activity, bites and stings, prescription medicines and what to include in a basic first aid kit.

The clinic is self-financing, with patients paying a consultation fee only if they do not subsequently receive vaccinations or purchase antimalarials at the clinic.

The pharmacy always has at least two pharmacists on duty, something which Mr Michie considers essential. "If you are going into travel medicine, in my opinion, it should only be done when supported by a second pharmacist supervising the regular pharmacy duties," he says.

In terms of training, Mr Michie explains that he has attended two travel medicine courses, one organised by NHS Grampian (see Panel), and one provided by one of the vaccine manufacturers. He is also a member of the British Travel Health Association and attends its courses and conferences. In addition, as part of the ongoing flu immunisation scheme, he attends annual courses on flu vaccination and treating anaphylaxis.

## **Topics covered by travel medicine training course run by NHS Grampian**

- Travel medicine risk assessments, vaccinations and antimalarials
- Principles of immunisation
- Legal requirements for consent
- Data protection
- Documentation required
- Professional accountability
- Use of patient group directions
- Cold chain requirements
- Assessment of fitness for vaccination, contraindications for vaccination
- Practical vaccination skills
- Preparation and disposal of vaccination equipment
- Identification and treatment of anaphylaxis



Ron Sumners/Dreamstime.com

The pharmacy clinic operates in conjunction with the local NHS travel clinic, which is run by doctors and nurses, and is located at a nearby hospital. "If they get overloaded they send the more straightforward cases to us. And, likewise, any difficult cases, such as pregnant women or people who have had transplants or a severe reaction to a previous vaccine, we refer

to the NHS travel clinic. In my experience the system works extremely well," he says.

Dr Hind says that the next steps will be to integrate the pharmacy service with GP and travel clinic services in order to create a tiered approach. "There has also been interest from community health partnerships that want to

provide a pharmacy service on an NHS basis on a much wider scale," she says. Dr Hind hopes to identify more pharmacists in the area who wish to run travel health clinics. ■