

Original article

Are French general practitioners consulted before travel to developing countries? A cross-sectional study conducted in a French airport

Les médecins généralistes font-ils partis du parcours de soins avant un voyage vers un pays en développement ? Étude transversale dans un aéroport français

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Abstract

Background. – General practitioners (GPs) could play a central role in preventing travel-related health issues. The aim of this study was to assess, in travellers departing to developing countries from a French airport, the proportion of individuals having sought GP counseling before departure and to identify determinants for having consulted a GP.

Methods. – Cross-sectional study conducted between November 2012 and July 2013, in all adults living in France. Sociodemographic, health characteristics, type of travel and resources consulted before departure were collected. A descriptive analysis was performed. Determinants for having consulted a GP before departure were investigated using a logistic regression analysis.

Results. – Of the 360 travellers included, 230 (64%) sought health counseling before departure. GPs were the main source of information for 134 (58%) travellers having sought health information and the only one for 49 (21%). Almost half of the travellers (48%) departing to sub-Saharan countries did not seek health counseling from a medical doctor (GP, non-GP specialist, specialist consulted in an international vaccination center or occupational physician). Individuals significantly more likely to travel without having consulted a GP were young and male, held foreign nationality, had travelled more than five times before, rarely consulted their GP and were travelling to a non-malarious area.

Conclusion. – GPs were the main but not the only source of information and counseling before traveling to a developing country. This study helps identify the characteristics of individuals likely to travel without having consulted a GP before departure.

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Keywords: Developing countries; Counseling; Travellers; General practice

Résumé

Objectif. – Depuis 60 ans, le nombre de voyageurs par vols internationaux suit une croissance exponentielle. Or la moitié des voyageurs présentent un problème de santé lié à leur voyage. Les médecins généralistes (MG) peuvent avoir un rôle central dans la prévention de ces problèmes de santé. L'objectif de cette enquête est d'évaluer, parmi les voyageurs en partance vers un pays en développement depuis l'aéroport de Roissy-Charles-de-Gaulle, la proportion de ceux ayant demandé conseil à un MG avant le départ et d'identifier les déterminants d'avoir eu recours à un MG.

Méthodes. – Étude transversale par hétéro-questionnaire, entre novembre 2012 et juillet 2013, auprès de tous les adultes résidant en France présents en salle d'attente. Les caractéristiques socio-démographiques et de santé, la nature du voyage et les ressources consultées avant le départ ont été recueillies. Une analyse descriptive a été effectuée. Les déterminants du recours aux MG ont été recherchés par régression logistique.

Résultats. – Parmi les 360 répondants, 230 (64 %) ont recherché des conseils pour leur santé avant leur départ. Les médecins généralistes ont été la principale source d'information pour 134 voyageurs (58 %) ayant recherché des conseils et ils étaient l'unique source d'information pour 49 d'entre eux (21 %). La moitié (48 %) des voyageurs vers l'Afrique sub-saharienne n'ont pas recherché de conseils auprès d'un médecin (médecin généraliste, autres spécialistes, médecins du travail et de centre international de vaccination) avant leur départ. Les personnes les plus à

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risque de partir en voyage vers un pays en développement sans avoir pris conseil auprès d'un médecin généraliste étaient des hommes jeunes, de nationalité étrangère, ayant voyagé plus de cinq fois antérieurement, consultant habituellement peu leur médecin généraliste et partant vers une zone non impaludée.

Conclusion. – Les MG sont la principale, mais non exclusive, source d'informations et de conseils avant un voyage en pays en développement. Cette étude a permis d'identifier des caractéristiques de voyageurs à risque de partir sans avoir bénéficié des conseils d'un MG avant le départ. © 2015 Elsevier Masson SAS. Tous droits réservés.

Mots clés : Pays en développement ; Médecine générale ; Conseils ; Voyageurs ; Parcours de soins

1. Introduction

For 60 years, the number of travellers on international flights has been rising exponentially: it reached 1.1 billion in 2013 [1]. About 50% of destinations concern developing countries [2]. However, travelling abroad, especially to a developing country, involves a health risk. Indeed, half of travellers experience a health problem during or after their trip [3]. In addition, these travellers could be a risk to the community by facilitating the dissemination of pathogens in the country visited as well as in their country of origin [4,5]. These health risks can be partly prevented through traveller information, explaining lifestyle and dietary rules, vaccination, prescribing appropriate antimalarial chemoprophylaxis and preparing a travel medical kit [6,7]. In this context, the general practitioner (GP), who is a proximate care and outreach prevention resource, plays an increasingly important role. Several European studies on sources of information and counseling for travellers have shown that GPs were the first source consulted before departure [8–11]. Facilitating access to care and preventive health through primary care and GPs are major objectives of European public health policies [12]. In France, a country with one of the highest densities of GPs in Europe [12], promoting prevention by GPs through a new organization of healthcare and financial benefits is being debated [13]. However, concerning risks related to travel, limited access to GPs or lack of counseling and information during contacts could have an impact on their prevention. To our knowledge, no study has focused specifically on determinants for consulting a GP before traveling to developing countries.

The aim of this study was to assess the proportion of travellers departing from Roissy-Charles-de-Gaulle (CDG) airport, Paris, France, having sought GP counseling before traveling to a developing country. The secondary objective was to identify the determinants for consulting a GP.

2. Methods

2.1. Population and study location

The study was conducted in the waiting rooms of CDG airport between November 2012 and July 2013. In 2013, CDG airport received about 35,000 travellers daily departing to developing countries. An investigator was randomly present in all airport terminals 15 times, corresponding to different days of the week, to question all travellers present in waiting rooms

using a hetero-questionnaire after oral consent, approaching a total of 1000 travellers. Inclusion criteria were: being older than 18 years, living in France and departing to a developing country. The exclusion criterion was: not speaking French.

2.2. Data collected

Sociodemographic and health characteristics, the type of travel and resources consulted before departure, were exhaustively collected by the investigator to avoid missing data. Data were anonymized. The French commission nationale de l'informatique et des libertés (CNIL) and ethics committee (CPP) issued a favorable opinion for conducting this study.

2.3. Analysis

A descriptive data analysis was performed. Continuous variables are presented as mean (standard deviation) and median [range]. Categorical variables are presented as frequencies (percentages).

Univariate and multivariate logistic regression analyses were performed to identify the determinants for consulting a GP before traveling. Explanatory variables included in the model were the traveller's characteristics, previous contacts with a GP and travel characteristics. Variables significantly associated using a univariate analysis with a *P*-value less than 10% (χ^2 or Fisher exact test) were included in the logistic regression model. Statistical analysis was performed at the alpha risk of 5% using EpiInfo 7.0 software.

3. Results

3.1. Population characteristics

Of the 1000 individuals approached, 398 (40%) met the inclusion criteria and were invited to participate in the study. Finally, 360 (90.5%) of the eligible individuals accepted to answer the questionnaire.

The male/female ratio was 1.1, the median age was 40 years (18–84 years) and the mean age was 41.2 years (SD 12.6). Sixty-two percent of the participants were French. The travellers' characteristics are presented in Table 1. Most travellers were followed by a GP since 321 (89%) declared they consulted a GP once a year and 220 (62%) declared they consulted a GP more than once a year. Otherwise, 354 individuals (98%) declared having already travelled abroad at least

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