

TRAVEL REMINDERS

If You Have A Mental Health Issue.....

With globalisation being a key element in CityU's strategic plan, student activities and learning experience outside Hong Kong are becoming more and more common. Such international and multicultural experience can be exciting and precious, however, it is often a stressful experience, too. Under the stress of travel, pre-existing mental health issues can be exacerbated. If the appropriate precautions are taken, most people affected by a mental health issue with a stable condition are able to safely travel abroad under the supervision of a mental health specialist. In addition to the general *Guidelines to Outbound Students*, the following tips may be useful for you to plan for your outbound learning experience.

Travel Checklist: Bring These With You All The Time

Your medications

Bring plenty plus extra to cover for any travel delays or losses.

A doctor's letter

Possession of some psychotropic medications without a *proof of prescription* may be illegal in some countries. It will also help the doctors in your destination understanding your medical details when you are in need.

Travel insurance documents

Have your documents ready with you, just in case you need to make a claim. Inform your insurers as soon as possible after any incident.

Identification

Such as a card with your contact details, the name of the hotel you are staying and/or an emergency contact (e.g. your medical doctor). Keep it in a purse or wallet, in case you get lost or disorientated in unfamiliar surroundings.

Contact details of mental health services at your destination

It will be very useful for you to reach appropriate service when a circumstance arises.

PLAN BEFORE YOUR TRIP

1) Information is power:

- Gathering information and planning carefully beforehand can lower stress levels and minimize the risk of any last minute panics or the aggravation of a pre-existing mental health issue.
- Useful information you may need included the availability of mental health resources at your travel destination (e.g. the nearest hospitals and clinics), language and cultural compatibility of their clinicians, and translators, etc.

2) Get clearance to travel from your doctor:

- Consult your medical doctor. Discuss your suitability for travel with him/her. You may need advice and/or extra medicine on your trip.
- Obtain reference letters from the doctor. In some countries, possession of psychotropic medication without proof of prescription is illegal. A doctor's letter can help you to avoid from unnecessary penalty and/or legal consequence. A letter including your doctor's contact details and explaining your psychiatric disorder would also be helpful in the instance when you need medical consultation at the travel destination.
- You are encouraged to give a copy of the doctor's letter to the staff-in-charge of your trip as soon as possible, so that they can assist you in case of emergency.

3) Discuss with your counsellor:

- If you have been seeing a counsellor, tell your counsellor about your trip once you are planning to go. Develop strategies with your counsellor to cope with the situations you may meet in a foreign country/place.
- Learning relaxation techniques (e.g. deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, etc) often helps to calm your mind from potentially stressful situations.
- If you have not seen a counsellor, you may contact *Counselling Service* at 3442 8478 to arrange a meeting with our counsellors to consult your mental health concerns for the trip.

4) Arrange a travel insurance with proper coverage:

- Travel insurance can protect you in case of emergencies (e.g. medical treatment) on your trip. You should arrange a travel insurance that provide coverage to your mental health situation during the trip.
- You may need to declare your mental health situation along with any other pre-existing medical conditions you might have.
- It is sometimes hard to decide which insurance policy to choose. Talk to your insurance agent or the staff-in-charge of your trip for advice.

5) Pack well in advance:

Making a list and adding to it as you remember things is a good way of making sure you pack everything. Tick off the list as you pack so that nothing gets left out.

Reference:

(1) International travel and health: Psychological health (WHO): http://www.who.int/ith/other_health_risks/psychological_health/en/

(2) Travelling With a Mental Illness: <https://www.talktotim.co.uk/blog/medical/2015/03/30/travelling-mental-illness/>

(3) Mental Health: Travelling Abroad: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/584029/FCO_MentalHealth_web_130117.pdf