



Tourists in Leishmaniasis Endemic Areas and their Knowledge of the Disease



Irmgard Bauer
PhD, MN, MPH&TM, MTourism, RN
James Cook University, Australia



BACKGROUND

- With the increase of tourism to tropical destinations, the need for travel health advice has increased
- American Cutaneous Leishmaniasis (ACL) is rarely included in this advice
- Numerous cases of tourists with ACL (*L. braziliensis*) have been described (eg. Melby '92, Caumes '95)
- Lack of education for travellers has been pointed out (eg. Herwald '93)

AIMS OF THE STUDY

To describe the knowledge and behaviour of tourists booked on a tour to Manu National Park in relation to leishmaniasis and its prevention.

METHOD

At the briefing the evening before the trip, 447 clients of two tour operators in Cusco / Peru were given a questionnaire as part of a larger intervention study on knowledge and behaviour in relation to leishmaniasis. Apart from demographic data and questions on travel health advice seeking behaviour (closed questions), clients were asked if they had heard of ACL, and if so, what they knew about the disease and its prevention (open questions).

RESULTS

Description of the Sample (n=447)		
	N	%
Gender		
Female	227	50.8
Male	220	49.2
Age (mean)	37	
Occupation		
Doctor	18	4.2
Nurse	13	3.0
Other health profession	12	2.8
Veterinarian	6	1.4
Biologist	6	1.4
Other scientist	12	2.8
Other occupation	362	84.4
First visit to Manu	443	99.1
Has visited other rainforests		
Yes	137	30.6
No	310	69.4



Had Heard about Leishmaniasis (n = 424)	
Occupation	no yes
Doctor	13 5 (2.8%)
Nurse	11 2 (1.5%)
Other health professional	11 1 (0.8%)
Veterinarian	5 1 (16%)
Biologist	4 1 (20%)
Other scientist	10 2 (16%)
Other occupation	342 16 (4%)
	28

Knowledge on the Disease

Of all 28 who had heard about the disease, some continued to share their knowledge:

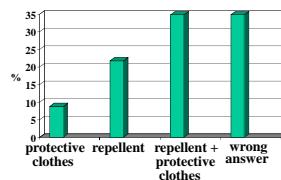
Correct:

- Transmission through sandfly (9)
- incubation period (1)
- bites.ulcers don't heal (3)
- tissue destruction (3)

Incorrect:

- Transmission through other insects (3)
- larvae hatch out under the skin (1)
- bacteria cause disease (1)
- it is called Chagas disease (1)
- this is Bilharzia (1)

Knowledge on Prevention (n=23)



Some incorrect preventative measures named were:

- keep away from sandbanks
- drink clean water, eat well cooked food
- do not walk barefoot
- do not swim in fresh water

Additional Results

- There is widespread confusion about what a 'sandfly' is
- There is a great interest in and need for travel health advice
- There is a widespread dissatisfaction with the travel health advice provided

DISCUSSION

- There was no significant difference between 1) health professionals and scientists, and 2) other occupations in relation to the accuracy of their knowledge of the disease and preventative measures.
- In particular, the lack of knowledge was highlighted by the wrong suggestions given for prevention.
- Appropriate information should be included in travel health advice so that travellers are aware of the correct preventative measures and returning travellers can alert their physicians about the possibility of an infection.

CONCLUSION

Correct and complete advice on Leishmaniasis needs to be included in travel health advice for travellers to endemic areas.