

UIAA Mountain Medicine Centre Information Sheet 7

Intended Distribution:UK Expedition Doctors
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INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT OF DRUGS, BOTTLED GAS AND OXYGEN

Drug trafficking, particularly in narcotics is a serious problem in many Himalayan and South American countries. These notes are designed to guide the well meaning but perhaps unwary expedition doctor who wants to take a medical kit well stocked with drugs for use on the mountain. This can be a very serious issued - they execute heroin traffickers in some countries and certainly detain and seriously inconvenience anyone who they might suspect!

The notes below simply outline experience gained on expeditions.

Practical Suggestions

1. Keep a detailed record of all the drugs you have in your medical kit, and divide them into controlled drugs (CD), keeping one separate list for these and one for all other drugs. This generally satisfies the officials when entering most countries (e.g. Nepal, India), however it may be best to check if an export license will be required for more out of the way destinations
2. You are strongly advised to carry controlled drugs (together with their listing) with you in your personal baggage, but the rest can be freighted with other expedition kit. You can obtain an export licence for CD's from the Home Office by writing to:

Licensing Department (Drugs)
Room 230
Home Office
Queen Anne's Gate
Petty France
London SW1H 9AT
Tel:020 7273 3806 (direct line)

You must state the type and quantity of controlled drugs you are carrying. This licence allows you to export (and re-import if you wish) controlled drugs from Britain.

3. You will also need to consider import licences for your country of destination. In theory you are supposed (having secured the UK export licence) to also obtain an import licence through the relevant embassy or high commission. In practice few of us do this but rely on the documentation above - I have not heard of any problems.
4. Medical Documents - customs officials and others will not know you are a doctor (nor, after your trip will you look like their perception of a doctor!). It is a good idea to carry your GMC certificate and a letter stating that you are who you are. This only needs be something as simple as a letter from a colleague, employer, bank manager etc - this sort of document often helps in many situations in the "greater range" countries

International Transport of Bottled Oxygen & Gas

For those expeditions wishing to take bottled oxygen, the rules governing freighting it are complicated. The essential point is that you are not allowed to send bottled oxygen on a passenger aircraft - it must be air freighted - so it is important to have contacted the airline well in advance of departure. Oxygen bottles (and also bottled gas e.g. propane/butane cartridges for stoves) also have to be appropriately crated. The Yellow Pages is a good starting point to find an airfreight agency, or in many cases the Alpine Club in the country you are visiting will be able to suggest a contact. Import authority from the Alpine Club (or equivalent) is necessary in some countries, so be sure to enquire in advance, otherwise you may end up spending most of your holiday in a customs shed!

Tip: It is wise, if you are using an internal airline (such as the internal Chinese airlines) to enquire whether the local regulations differ from the international ones. We have been told it is not possible to airfreight oxygen within China but we have in fact done so.

Updated October 2002 by Dr Charles Clarke FRCP

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