Common Medical Problems During Hajj
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Hajj is an annual pilgrimage to Mecca which is performed by Muslims who can afford it. It starts from the 1st Dhul Hijjah and culminates on the 10th Dhul Hijjah, the day of Eid. Annually around 2.5 million people from all over the world visit the cities of Mecca and Medina around this period. The season of Hajj varies every year as it follows the lunar Islamic calendar. Therefore the diseases too vary depending on the temperature in these two holy cities (1).

The huge ocean of humanity constitutes males and females of all age groups. Medical illnesses are therefore not uncommon. The various categories of common problems faced by a Hajji are:

I. Age related: fatigue, dehydration, falls, trauma, fractures, and chances of stampede.

II. Infections: especially involving the respiratory tract are very common during Hajj. The pilgrims from Indonesia are notorious for this. We have seen pulmonary tuberculosis too and in many cases the open type. A few episodes of food poisoning too are seen. The previously much talked about meningococcal meningitis is rare.

III. Heat related: problems are common if Hajj falls during the summer season. Sun burn on the face, shoulder and chest is common. Heat exhaustion and rarely heat stroke is encountered.

IV. Metabolic: problems like hypoglycemia are common. The reasons are many (2). In our six Hajj duty experiences, we have noted that diabetic ketoacidosis is rare.

V. Cardiovascular: problems like accelerated hypertension, angina, myocardial infarction, congestive cardiac failure are common. Patients with disorders like atrial fibrillation are often found collapsed around the Kaaba, usually while performing tawaf. Missing the dose, stopping treatment, or exerting more can all contribute.

VI. Miscellaneous: flare up of psychiatric disorders is occasionally seen.

The doctor on Hajj duty should be active, alert, agile, helpful and knowledgeable. This way he can save many lives during these 10 crucial days. It is a unique experience for the one who has performed this duty and he/she can learn in ten days most if not all the medical and surgical emergencies. Moreover he can take away many professionally satisfying memories to cherish later in life.

References:

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