Medical Care for Japanese Tourists in Taiwan
Geng-Shiau Lin, M.D.
Department of Emergency Medicine
National Taiwan University Hospital

Tourism between Taiwan and Japan has been flourishing for decades. The number of Japanese traveler arrivals in Taiwan is 1.08 million in 2008, despite the current global economic downturn. The information of medical service is important for the travelers. With the well-established medical system in Taiwan, the travelers can get effective and high-quality medical service. All these advantages, coupled with cultural similarity and the Taiwanese people's hospitality, Japanese tourists can travel safe in Taiwan. Here are some information and suggestions for tourists, travel agencies, and doctors.

1. Pre-travel preparedness

The pre-travel preparedness includes medical advice and care during the travel is necessary for all travelers. Medical information is based on traveler’s itinerary where, when, why, how is the trip carried out and what will the tourist be doing during journey. A tourist visiting the urban area in Taiwan for several days to a few weeks will have less risk of disease than one staying for several months and traveling to rural areas.

With the assistance of the travel agency and tour guide, the travelers should only prepare his personal health information and medical history. However, for a backpacker, further in depth in medical service available in Taiwan and an individualized medical emergency plan including the information should be listed in the itinerary.

Although it is possible to have translator-assisted medical service in regional general hospital and medical center in Taiwan, it will be convenient for the Taiwan doctors to provide health service if basic medical information including history of past illness, vaccine, allergy and drug prescription are readily available.

2. General condition of the medical service in Taiwan

The medical services in Taiwan are classified as medical centers, regional general hospitals, local hospitals, and clinics. For tourists, the medical centers and regional general hospitals would be a better
choice because the facilities more equipped and translators are available. There are some web sites that provide the information of the possible local hospitals and clinics for Japanese tourists. However, these might be better choices for those staying long-term.

If the travelers were to stay in Taiwan for several months, it might convenient to first visit the international outpatient department in the regional general hospitals or medical centers then receive treatment in the outpatient department or in a general clinic.

3. The emergency medical services in Taiwan

The emergency medical services in Taiwan have been established for over 10 years. With regular education and training, this system has matured overtime. Taiwan people utilized the service regularly and patients are sent to suitable level of hospitals according to the severity of disease and the geographic location. Although the Chinese the language of use, many Taiwan people now speak English, sometimes even Japanese.

4. The outpatient department

In most medical centers in Taiwan, it is not difficult to find a translator to help the doctor and the patient. However, a better way is to visit the international outpatient center. Further appointment can be arranged by the staff of the hospital.

a. In the ordinary outpatient departments

Generally, outpatient service is cost-effective but can also be time-consuming. In Taiwan, there is also always overcrowded situation in the outpatient departments. It is not that easy for tourists to choose an appropriate doctor unless the tourists are well prepared.

b. The international outpatient departments or family physician may be convenient for the first visit

For the convenience of the foreign tourists, many regional general hospitals and medical center established international outpatient departments (or centers) providing translator to assist the foreigners seeking medical help. This is the easiest way for travelers visiting for the first time. The family physicians also
provide similar service. Regular appointments in the outpatient departments can be arranged after the first visit.

c. **The specialty will focus on specialized condition**
   The doctors at outpatient facilities are highly experienced in their specialty. If the patient does not choose the appropriate specialty, doctors usually advice patients simple instructions, necessary laboratory examinations, and arrange appointments to the appropriate specialty in next visit. If necessary, the doctor sometimes refers the patient to other specialty or to the emergency department directly.

d. **Ask for translation help in information desk**
   In main entrance of the lobby of the hospitals, there is always an information desk where the foreigner could ask for a translator support. However, it is highly recommended to make a phone call to make sure a translator is available.

**e. Things to be checked before visiting the doctors**
   (1) **Brief personal history**
      - Medication, drug or food allergy
   (2) **Major admission or operation summary**
      - Simple description about this admission
      - Digital record of the X-film and CT scan
      - Result of recent Laboratory data

5. **The emergency department**
   The designs and operations of the emergency department in Taiwan are adopted from the United States. Emergency department is in every regional general hospital or medical center. On the average, emergency department of a medical center offers emergency care to more than 200 patients daily and more than 100 patients in a regional general hospital.

   All the physicians in the emergency departments board qualified physician of emergency medicine are usually, a senior residents or attending physician takes care of the foreign travelers because they are more experienced. All physicians speak fluent English.

a. **The emergency doctors will focus on emergent condition first**
The overcrowded situation of the ER has been a known problem in Taiwan. Despite of this, the ER thrives to provide every patient with high quality medical care as efficiently as possible. The emergency doctors rapidly identify life-threatening conditions, perform stabilizing procedures, and then further assessment to identify a more definite diagnosis.

b. Ask for translation help in triage area

In every emergency department, there is a triage station in which an experience ER nurse assesses how serious the patient is. The triage system allows patients with life-threatening problems to be seen first. The foreign tourists can ask for a translator in the triage area.

Although the emergency department is always busy, the ER doctor provides treatment efficiently. Most of the emergency doctors in Taiwan could communicate with fluent English and few could speak Japanese. Thus, it will be easy to find a translator to assist the doctor to help the Japanese tourist. The social workers in the hospital can also provide necessary help for the foreign tourists.

c. If condition changes, feel free to ask for help

The experience of waiting can be frustrating for tourists. If the tourist feels the physical condition changed, he or she could remind the doctor at any moment without hesitation. Every staff realizes that being in an emergency department is stressful experience for foreign tourists and will help them as much as possible.

After the doctor assesses the general condition, the patient can ask questions about the possible diagnosis, necessary examination, and the treatment.

If the problem is simple, the emergency doctor would give the patients clear instructions and prescribe drugs. However, if it is necessary, the ER doctor will consult specialists immediately.

d. Things to be checked before leaving the hospitals

(1) Instruction sheets:

● The doctors might give the patients a simple note with
list of things to know about the final diagnosis

(2) Drugs or prescriptions
- The travelers should ask the doctors the questions about the time, duration, and possible complications

(3) Appointments for outpatient department if necessary
- If the travelers will continue the tour, ask the doctors for the possible appointments in this or other hospitals

(4) Summary from the emergency department
- Simple description about this admission
- Digital record of the X-film and CT scan
- Result of Laboratory data
- Certification for insurance
- any other information that you need before leaving the hospital

e. Things especially important for Japanese tourist
   (1) The doctors might give the patients a simple note.
   (2) Feel free to ask for help. It is never impolite to ask for help.
   (3) Because there may be laboratory tests or procedures that require the patient not to eat or drink beforehand, you should ask the doctors if you can eat or drink.
   (4) Since it is often overcrowded in the emergent department, it is necessary to be careful of personal valuables. Despite efforts by hospital staff, theft remains an issue.
   (5) Mobile phones must be turned off before going into the treatment area, as they may interfere with hospital equipments. You could ask the nurse to find an area to use your mobile phones.

6. Medical care for cardiovascular, cerebrovascular, and traumatic emergency

   Especially if the medical emergency is a life threatening one, where or not the emergency medical system can provide a high quality care is a concern of every foreign traveler. High-quality health care providers are widely available in the emergency department of medical center and regional general hospital in Taiwan. With the well established emergency medical service system in Taiwan, any traveler can dial “119” for immediate response. The emergency departments
would provide emergent care. Although there are overcrowded situation in the emergency department in Taiwan, most patients can receive medical care quickly. The emergency physicians in the regional general hospitals and medical centers practice under strict professional credential, license, and continuing education. They are skillful in diagnosis and treatment of critical emergencies. Once the diagnosis is conformed, consultation of a specialist will be arranged. Except for personal and elective reasons, evacuation for medical attention for the traveler in Taiwan is not necessary.

a. Cardiovascular emergency
   As the society ages, the emergency departments of regional general hospitals and medical centers in Taiwan are equipped to manage cardiovascular emergency effectively. Primary resuscitation under the guideline of Advanced Cardiac Life Support are provided in every emergency department. Once diagnosis of acute myocardial infarction is made, a cardiovascular physician will be consulted. Primary percutaneous coronary interventions are readily available 24hrs.

b. Cerebrovascular emergency
   Cerebrovascular emergency is another common emergency in Taiwan. CT scans are available in every regional general hospital and MRI is available in every medical centers. Neurosurgical or neurological consultation is always done. Treatments, such as the use of thrombolytics or surgical intervention, are assessable.

c. Traumatic emergency
   The quality of trauma resuscitation has been improved after the introduction of Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS) program to Taiwan in the 1996. After primary resuscitation and evaluation, a specialist will be consulted according to different injuries. For multiple trauma patients, a trauma specialist is available in every medical center. Trauma surgeons practice under professional credential by the Formosa Association for the Surgery of Trauma.
7. National Taiwan University Hospital
   a. History of National Taiwan University Hospital

      The predecessor of National Taiwan University Hospital (NTUH) was Taihoku (Taipei) Hospital founded by Japanese during the Japanese colonial era on June 18, 1895 at a location in the Tataochen District of Taipei. It moved to its present location (West-Site) in 1897. At that time, the Taihoku (Taipei) Hospital was the largest and most modern hospital in southeast Asia.

      The Taihoku (Taipei) Hospital was later annexed to the Medical School of Taihoku Imperial University (Taihoku Teikoku Daigaku) and renamed Taipei Imperial University Medical School Affiliated Hospital in 1938. After World War II and Taiwan's retrocession to Chinese Sovereignty, the R.O.C. government resumed the administration of Taihoku University and reorganized and renamed it "National Taiwan University" on November 15, 1945. The Taipei Imperial University Medical School Affiliated Hospital was also renamed as “National Taiwan University Hospital”.

      On October 19, 1991, the completion of a large new building on the so-called East Site marked another milestone in the history of the NTUH. The hospital consist of more than 4,000 employees serving approximately 2,000 inpatients and 7,000 outpatients daily. The hospital remains the best-known and most highly-renowned medical center in Taiwan.

   b. The Department of Emergency Medicine

      The Department of Emergency Medicine is staffed by board certified Emergency Medicine doctors, residents, and nursing staff. Subspecialities include emergency medicine, traumatology, pediatric emergency, toxicology, disaster medicine, critical care and resuscitation.

      There are 3 full-time faculties, 25 attending physicians, and 27 residents in the Emergency Department. Our faculty and staff are also expertise in other disciplines, such as gastroenterology, general surgery, cardiology, nephrology, and pulmonary medicine.
c. **International Outpatient Center**

The International Outpatient Center was established on Jan. 2006 and has designated the healthcare providing facility of American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), International SOS and foreign embassies/missions in Taiwan, and is observing increasing demands from Canada, US, Japan, Austria, Germany, UK, Lebanon, and Mainland China.

The traveler could have medical services with assistance from the staffs and the doctors.