PHYSICAL MORBIDITY DURING THE 27TH INDIAN SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION TO ANTARCTICA

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The objective of the study is to discuss the physical health disorders encountered by the winter team of the 27th Indian Scientific Expedition to Antarctica (ISEA). 26 male personnel wintered over at the Indian Antarctic Station, Maitri from February 2008 to January 2009. The age of the members was 27 to 59 years. The mean age was 43.65 years. The physical morbidity of the team was analyzed using the records of medical room consultations maintained during the expedition. As revealed during personal health interviews, 9 members had preexisting illnesses; among these, 2 members each gave a history of preexisting hypertension and diabetes mellitus type 2. There were a total of 92 first time and recurrent disease Medical Room consultations. One member did not need any consultation. Out of 92 consultations, 32 (34.8%) pertained to Internal Medicine, 26 (28.3%) to General Surgery, 15 (16.3%) to Orthopaedics, 9 (9.8%) to ENT, 8 (8.69%) to Ophthalmology, and 2 (2.17%) to Dentistry. There were 4 cases requiring prolonged absence from work; one team member suffered 2 attacks of suspected Acute Appendicitis and another 2 presented with low back ache. It was observed that most of the consultations were for musculoskeletal injuries and bruises & lacerations attributable to outdoor occupational physical activity. There was a preponderance of oral ulcers during the initial part of wintering. This was checked by encouraging all the individuals to take regular nutritional supplements and sprouts of chickpeas, wheat and fenugreek seeds. There was just one case of cold-related injury (chill blain) during the expedition and none due to exposure to solar radiation. This was because of strong emphasis on use of protective gear.