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# Swine Flu: the latest impediment to one stop security

by Philip Baum



**F**or all our deliberations about enhancing passenger facilitation at airports and reducing the need for multiple checks by numerous government agencies, our best efforts are often stymied by the realities of trying to operate in the most global of all global industries. Aviation, by its very nature, brings together the best and the worst, the most confident and the most vulnerable, and the wealthiest and the poorest of society and places them, in close proximity to each other, in a single aluminium tube miles above the planet's surface.

Whilst we aim to cater for the business traveller and the tourist, the sportsman and the academic, we have to face the fact that we also transport criminals, deportees, anti-social drunkards, victims of human trafficking, psychologically disturbed individuals and those for whom air travel can transport them from destitution to the comparative lap of luxury. Other modes of transport have to contend with similar challenges, but usually only one at a time. Add to the mix the current economic crisis and the picture is far from rosy and the glamorous image of the industry a distant memory.

It is the norm that the media is criticised for enhancing the general public's fear and many will make accusations that the media takes pleasure in fuelling a crisis. This is easily said when concern is high yet deaths are few in number, but most health professionals will attest to the fact that many of the world's killer diseases have either been eradicated or controlled through highly effective, well-oiled media campaigns, whereby the education of the masses has been the key element.

The challenges we face in preventing inadmissible passengers, as a result of documentation, from boarding our aircraft are of little interest to the majority of

passengers. Many actually enjoy the passport inspection process and take pride in the number of tourist entry visa stamps they can amass. It is a rare opportunity to declare one's nationality by presenting an official document and it is not perceived to be a test of our own integrity. The security checks, be they customs-, screening- or quarantine-orientated, generate different feelings. We are being evaluated, our honesty questioned, our intent considered and, ever since 26 April 2009, our propensity to infect others put to the test.

At the time of writing, it has been less than a month since Influenza A(H1N1) reared its ugly head and the World Health Organisation (WHO) started documenting cases. In airports around the globe, especially in Asia, employees reverted to SARS-style defensive tactics, as they donned masks to stave off infection. Small wonder when the WHO states that, "Outbreaks in humans are now occurring from human-to-human transmission. When infected people cough or sneeze, infected droplets get on their hands, drop onto surfaces, or are dispersed into the air. Another person can breathe in contaminated air, or touch infected hands or surfaces, and be exposed. To prevent spread, people should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing, and wash their hands regularly." Welcome to the ugly and, as such, appropriately named world of swine flu!

We have witnessed a re-emergence of thermal cameras positioned to screen passengers as they arrive at overseas airports, the issuance of in-flight questionnaires seeking air travellers contact details and travel history and spot checks to test their temperature. And passengers take it...

True, they have little choice, but we do have this knack of subjecting passengers to a degree of scrutiny that would never be accepted in any other environment. I'm no

biologist, nor am I a medic, but my guess is that the risk of infection being spread on the underground (subway) is considerably greater when considering the numbers of people who travel every day in packed sub-terranean railway carriages. Yet, no checks there, nor on public buses. The key difference seems to be that, whilst we all claim to live in a global village, understandably our governments act in the best interest of their own nation States. There is a perception that the world is a better place if swine flu and al Qaeda operatives remain overseas...ideally together...as then it's "their" problem, not "ours".

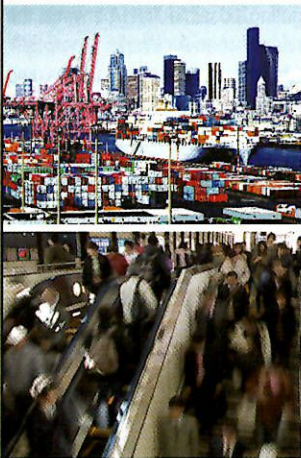
Fortunately, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) is working with the WHO to ensure that air travel continues unimpeded. Giovanni Bisignani, IATA's Director General and CEO, stated, "People getting on planes should be reassured of two things. First, even under normal circumstances, airlines have equipment and measures in place to keep the cabin environment safe. For example modern aircraft have air filtration systems similar to those in hospitals, aircraft are regularly disinfected as part of normal cleaning routines and crew are trained in handling procedures for passengers who might become ill on board aircraft. Secondly, the years of planning for the possibility of avian influenza have prepared the industry to deal efficiently with the unfolding situation."

And it would seem to be the case that many carriers have implemented rigorous programmes. ACM Narongsak Sangapong, Thai International's Senior Executive Vice President, Corporate Secretariat, and Acting President, said that, "THAI has implemented preventive measures to safeguard against the spread of the Mexican strain of swine influenza subtype H1N1 and has set up a Crisis Management Operations Centre to issue the preventive measures." He went on to say that, "The preventive public health measures are built upon the same

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principles that THAI implemented during the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) pandemic." How is this being done? Well, according to the company's website, through regular deep-clean fumigation "on board flights flown to and from high-risk countries for approximately 30-40 minutes prior to next flight departure." On THAI, 36 "common touch points" are disinfected as an additional preventive swine influenza measure and are listed as including, the safety pamphlet, in-flight magazine, seatbelt, seat itself, meal tray, armrest, aircraft door, windows, sink and counter, toilet flush button, lid and seat, and trash bin lid amongst others. Encouraging or worrying, the fact that a programme is in place is, at least, responsible and it all happens beyond the passenger's gaze.

Yet, elsewhere even this is not deemed a sufficient countermeasure. Peru, for example, banned all flights to and from Mexico for two weeks following the onset of the pandemic.

For many years the concept of one stop security has been the holy grail of many airline security managers: the utopian idea is that passengers should undergo security controls at their point of departure and then be check-

free until they reach their destination. At the very least, for those passengers who transit other States, they should not have to be re-screened at the transit airport. At best, one stop should really be one stop and all the security checks should be effected at a single point and for the various security agencies to then communicate pertinent information to each other.

There are signs that one stop security may finally become reality as far as transit passengers are concerned. In Europe, this May, France joined many other EU States by announcing that passengers who have already been screened at a European airport will not need to be screened a second time when making flight connections. World-wide roll-out of the concept is some way off as it would require a common recognition of standards and trust in the performance (and monitoring thereof) levels of other States.

With many States rightly regarding adherence to the Standards and Recommended Practices of Annex 17 as being an absolute minimum and, in reality, the Standards being woefully insufficient, how can such States ever have faith in their neighbours that simply claim they "meet international

standards"? We can all point to the fallibilities that exist with the existing system - we see them when we travel, we read of them in the newspapers and we know, hand on heart, that they exist. The global auditing programme is pretty toothless (how many States can you cite that have been blacklisted as a result of their inadequate security measures?) so, as a result, we end up protecting our own interests in the same way that we protect our homes, however good the reputation of the local police.

And maybe that's a good thing! Maybe one stop security really is a worthy ideal but, in practice, security, like charity, begins at home? It may also be true that airports are natural filtration points that afford us an opportunity to sift through the good from the bad?

And so it would seem with swine flu. Each State has elected what measures it wishes to put in place to keep its population "clean" and, for most, that involves erecting yet another security hurdle for the ever-tolerant travelling public to overcome. Security works on the basis of our not trusting those whom we do not know.

Xenophobia, therefore, is the real enemy of one stop security.