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View from my clinic

Being an expedition doctor is a challenging yet rewarding field of medicine, allowing medics to combine their interest in remote and rural medicine with itchy feet and an adventurous spirit.

The photo below was taken while I was waiting for my next patient to arrive at Barafu Camp, Kilimanjaro at 4673 metres. I had arranged an 'open access' clinic after lunch on our acclimatisation day to see the participants who had medical concerns or just wanted a chat.

Kilimanjaro has several routes to its Kibo summit at 5895 metres. At altitudes over 2000 metres, the problems of acute mountain sickness, high altitude pulmonary oedema, and high altitude cerebral oedema can be encountered. Sound knowledge of the physiology of altitude and management of these potentially life-threatening conditions is as crucial as the medic.

The training I had done in expedition and wilderness medicine had prepared me to be alert for the medical and logistical challenges of major trauma and resuscitation in remote locations. Thankfully these situations are reasonably uncommon, and the mainstay of day-to-day medical issues on the trek included fairly bread-and-butter general practice problems. Gastrointestinal upsets, chest infections, sore throats, musculoskeletal complaints, headaches, and psychological problems may sound quite straightforward, however,

Barafu Camp, Kilimanjaro (4673 metres).



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During my 2012 trip, I was asked to see a porter who had badly sprained his ankle, treated a young girl for suspected high altitude pulmonary oedema with a concurrent lower respiratory tract infection at 4673 metres, and had to fluid resuscitate and evacuate a young chap who had become very dehydrated following gastroenteritis and poor fluid intake. The variety, and often initial subtlety of presentations teamed with participants avid eagerness to summit means that keeping a close eye on individuals and having a low index of suspicion for evolving problems is of great importance.

My role as trip medic didn't just involve being a doctor to the participants, but also being their motivator, their shoulder-to-cry-on, provider of reassurance, and mountain guide!

Further information about expedition and wilderness medicine and relevant courses can be obtained by visiting the following websites:

- www.expeditionmedicine.co.uk
- www.wemsi-international.org
- www.wildernessmedicaltraining.co.uk
- www.wms.org

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