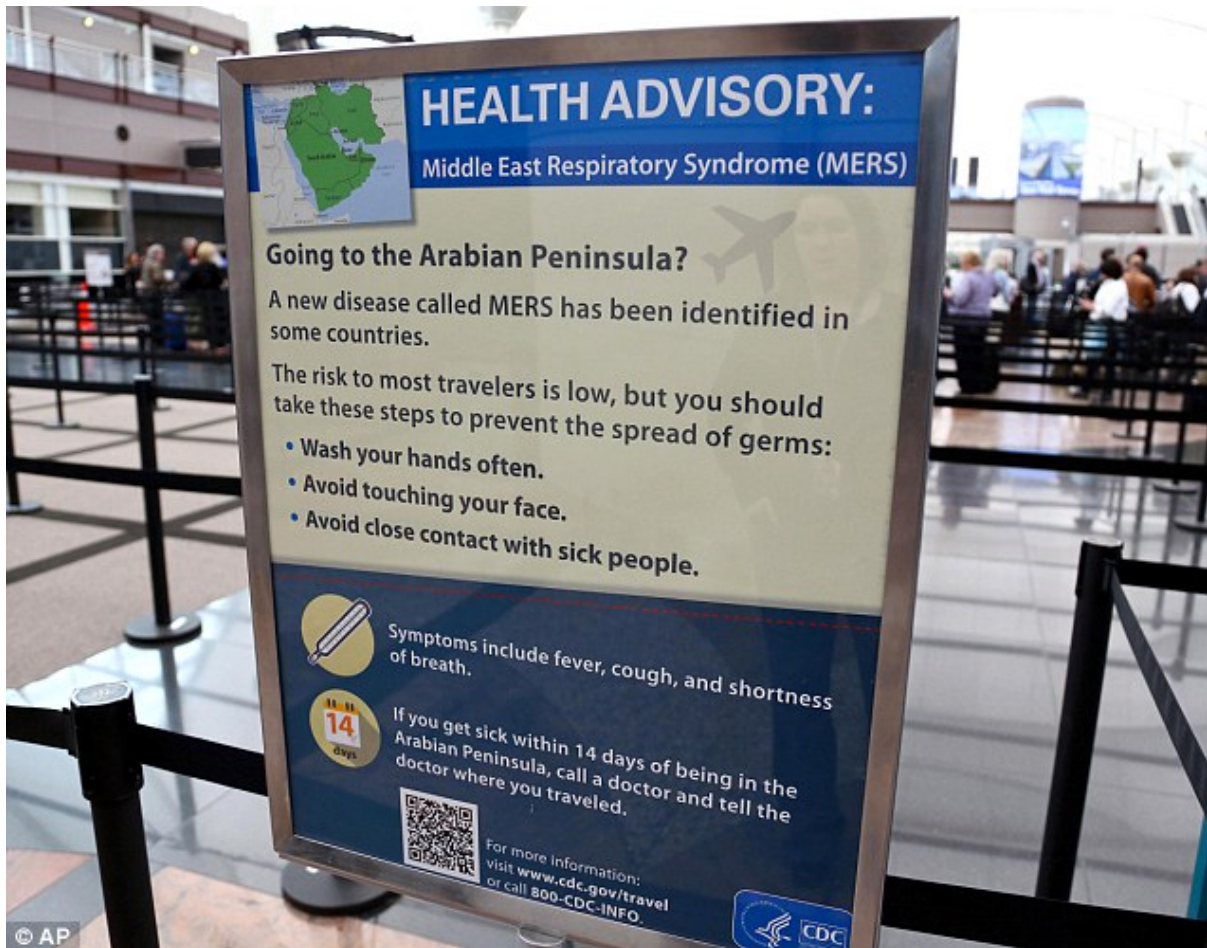


Signs of Terminal Illness

From forced marriage to alcoholic excess, Britain's airports display the symptoms of cultural rot.

by Theodore Dalrymple



My wife recently sent me a photograph of a police notice in bright red on the inside of the women's lavatory at the provincial English airport from which she was flying to Paris. It read: "Don't want to fly? Tell us why. Call the police or speak to a member of the staff."

Around the edges of the notice were given various reasons why a woman might not want to fly: "Forced marriage, Female genital mutilation."

So that no one could say that Muslims were being discriminated against, though the notice was obviously directed mainly at

them, other reasons were given: “Modern day slavery, Domestic abuse, Human trafficking, Smuggling, Child sexual exploitation.”

I was all too familiar from my medical work with the problems young women of Pakistani origin sometimes experienced at the airport. They were on their way to Pakistan to marry (voluntarily or not) their betrothed first cousin in their ancestral village, often at the age of 15 or 16. Their parents would allow them possession of their passports only to go through immigration and for identification while boarding the aircraft. These girls knew that if they did not agree to marry their intended (though not intended by *them*), they would face an ascending scale of emotional blackmail, imprisonment, violence, torture, and even death.

Whether the notice was effective in preventing this appalling situation may be doubted. These young ladies were probably deprived of the use of their mobile phones and not allowed on their own into the lavatory.

Another airport notice draws attention to a different behavioral problem. An imitation departure-screen has a list of flights interspersed with red bands:

LADS HOLIDAY– CANCELLED–TOO DRUNK TO FLY

DREAM HOLIDAY–CANCELLED–TOO DRUNK TO FLY

HEN DO–CANCELLED–TOO DRUNK TO FLY

At the bottom of the notice it says:

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

DRINKING TO EXCESS COULD STOP YOU FLYING

I know of no other country in the world in which such a warning notice at an airport is necessary. It is certainly not

unusual in British airports, especially provincial ones, to see rowdy men drinking pint after pint of beer at seven in the morning. There are said to be bars in Europe that display "No English" notices. One can't blame them.

Returning home after their drunken routs abroad, they (and foreigners) are greeted with notices at immigration that abuse of or assaults on immigration officers are taken extremely seriously. Taxis from English provincial airports inform passengers that they will be charged a fee for cleaning up any vomit they leave behind.

Welcome to England.

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