

Drake Passage might have altered the tragic outcome for this patient.

I recommend a book by Levinson, a seasoned polar physician, and Ger on health aspects of polar tourism.³ They have collated the findings of a conference held on this topic at Cambridge in the United Kingdom in 1995. The book addresses what Levinson describes as "the often inadequate medical care which exists in these regions". He notes "major concerns...expressed by travel experts, the American Medical Association, the American College of Emergency Physicians, and other professional organisations."³

The survey by Curry and Johnston found that illnesses among their company's Antarctic tourists in 1997 and 1998 included cardiac arrest, acute myocardial infarction, severe pneumonia, diabetic ketoacidosis due to seasickness, haematemesis, anaphylaxis, ruptured ectopic pregnancy and acute appendicitis.

The fact that polar trips are short does not seem to protect against potentially lethal diseases. Given the stress of this travel and the nature of the population involved, maybe the contrary applies.

1. Lamberth P. Death In Antarctica. *Med J Aust* 2001; 175: 583-584.
2. Curry C, Johnston M. Emergency doctors by sea to Antarctica: small ship medicine in polar regions. *Emerg Med (Fremantle)* 2001; 13: 233-236
3. Levinson JM, Ger E, editors. Safe passage questioned. Medical care & safety for the polar tourist. Centreville, MD: Cornell Maritime Press, 1998: xi,xii. □

Books as carriers of disease

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TO THE EDITOR: The experience described by Jones on books as carriers of disease in a recent issue of the Journal,¹ following Ferson's article in the Christmas issue,² reminded me of my experience in about 1933 at the Coast Hospital (now Prince Henry Hospital) at Little Bay, Sydney.

My mother was a medical resident at the Coast, which was the infectious diseases hospital for NSW. She developed acute diphtheria and was admitted. I (aged five) and my sister had been immunised and were not sick. However, we were throat swabbed, and the swabs were positive for *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*. We spent three weeks in the hospital with no treatment until we returned negative throat swabs. While waiting to be admitted to the "blocks", we saw children with shaven heads through glass doors, and I've always assumed they were the ones with scarlet fever, as did Jones.¹

I was given *The Anzac book*, on Gallipoli, to browse through. This is now a collector's item and very valuable. Then, much to my chagrin, I was not allowed to take it home.

Later, in 1953, I was to return to my old ward as a resident medical officer, although I was never to find out what happened to all those books!

1. Jones K. Books as carriers of disease [letter]. *Med J Aust* 2002; 176: 196.
2. Ferson MJ. Books as carriers of disease. *Med J Aust* 2001; 175: 663-664. □

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