



Concept

Supporting Expatriates concerning Health Issues

PSYCHOSOCIAL CASE MANAGEMENT TO SUPPORT EXPATRIATES AND THEIR FAMILIES

“Expats and their families are exposed to a wide range of psychosocial stressors on assignments. When a health issue arises on top of that, feeling overwhelmed is almost inevitable.”

Dr. Bärbel Klepp
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Expatriates in Austria

Austria is a popular destination for expatriates for various reasons, including professional opportunities, education, or simply due to the high quality of life. Current estimates suggest that around 600,000 expatriates reside in Austria, with many coming from EU countries as well as overseas. Often family members accompany them, in fact it is estimated that approximately 30-40% of expatriates bring their partners and children, which further influences their integration into Austrian society.

Despite the high quality of life and beautiful scenery, expatriates in Austria face various challenges. One of the biggest hurdles is the language barrier. Although many Austrians speak English, German is the primary language in daily life and most professional sectors. This can complicate integration and lead to feelings of isolation among expatriates.

Another issue is cultural adjustment. Austria has a distinct culture that is often perceived as reserved. Newcomers may not find doors and hearts opened to them quickly. This can result in misunderstandings and a sense of alienation. Additionally, Austria is frequently ranked as one of the least friendly countries for expatriates in various surveys. Factors such as bureaucracy, difficulty in making social connections, and the general attitude towards foreigners contribute to this reputation. Moreover, Viennese people are known for their tendency to express dissatisfaction, which, while often not meant to be harsh, can be off-putting. A common characteristic is the immediate response of "nothing can be done" ("No, that won't work," "No, that doesn't exist")—however, persistence usually reveals a solution.

In summary, expatriates in Austria experience both opportunities and challenges. While the quality of life is high, they often have to navigate linguistic and cultural barriers that complicate their integration.

The Austrian Health Care System

The Austrian healthcare system is particularly complex and can be difficult for many patients to navigate. Funding in the outpatient sector is provided by health insurance funds, while the federal states are responsible for financing the hospital sector. These separate systems are not optimally interconnected, leading to confusion and uncertainty among patients.

This challenge is especially pronounced for patients who live and work across state borders. For example, many individuals work in Vienna but reside in neighbouring Lower Austria. In such cases, differing regulations and services from respective health insurance funds and healthcare facilities can create additional difficulties, complicating access to healthcare services.

This fragmentation of the system makes it challenging for patients to find their way in the healthcare landscape and receive the necessary care. It can be particularly overwhelming for those who have had little prior interaction with the healthcare system before a diagnosis, therefore when a health issue arises within a family, expatriates face significant challenges.

Health Literacy

Health literacy refers to individuals' ability to understand, evaluate, and apply health information in order to make informed decisions about their health. Well-educated individuals often assume a high level of health literacy. However, health literacy tends to decrease with the complexity of the healthcare system and the severity of illnesses. This challenge is further exacerbated by language barriers and cultural differences, which present significant hurdles for many patients and their families.

As a result, many feel overwhelmed and require individual support and guidance to obtain the necessary information and make appropriate health decisions.

Psychosocial Case Management

Psychosocial Counselling

The more serious a diagnosis or illness is, the more likely it is to trigger a range of fears and emotions in the affected individuals and their families. Life can become destabilized, and suddenly decisions must be made that had not been previously considered. When one is "not at home," professional help and empathetic support are particularly essential in such situations.

Case Management

Following a diagnosis, there are often countless things that need to be organized - this is where case management can be a helpful approach. Case managers take on the role of navigators through the healthcare system, planning, organizing, and coordinating what is truly needed.

What does this mean for your organization

If you have employees from abroad, they or their relatives may find themselves in a serious situation where they need to access medical services. This can place a burden on your employees or even lead them to consider ending their international assignment early in order to return home and back to a more familiar healthcare system.

This is where my offer of psychosocial case management can provide professional support.

Services/Rates for Organizations

Direct Consultation

Consultation at the place of residence or work in the Vienna area:

- Session (50 min): € 250

Case Management

Billed at the end of the month per commenced ¼ hour:

- Unit (60 min): € 250

About Dr. Bärbel Klepp

Dr. Bärbel Klepp, a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, has worked in the Austrian healthcare system for 30 years in various organizations and roles. Her career path led her from research, to teaching at university level, to consumer advocacy (VKI), public administration (Ministry of Health), and into industry. There, her career advanced to the Austrian leadership team of well known international pharmaceutical companies. Her professional journey has given her a comprehensive understanding of the Austrian healthcare system and its unique features.

At the end of 2022, she left the industry to follow her true calling: to make her knowledge and network directly available to patients. With "Care for You", Dr. Klepp offers psychosocial case management for people who feel overwhelmed by their illness. Consultation and support are provided in English or German, depending on individual needs.

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