

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

# The European Lung Foundation database on airlines' policies for patients who require oxygen supplementation during air travel

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### Dear Sir,

We read with great interest the letter published recently in the *PCRJ* entitled "Airline acceptability of CPAP: is relevant information available on airlines' websites?" by Walters *et al.*<sup>1</sup> We would like to share a similar experience encountered by the European Lung Foundation (ELF) when creating a database to aid passengers who require supplementary oxygen to travel by plane.

Established in 2000 as the public voice of the European Respiratory Society (ERS), the ELF shares the knowledge and expertise of the ERS members with patients and the general public. This is mainly done via our website [www.european-lung-foundation.org](http://www.european-lung-foundation.org) which is available in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Russian and Greek.

Policies for oxygen supplementation vary between carriers. Patients with hypoxia who need in-flight oxygen are therefore advised to check with the airline before making a booking. Anecdotally, this can be a daunting and complex process.

In response to this, the ELF has created an Air Travel Database, which aims to provide accurate information to facilitate the organisation of travel for respiratory patients and healthcare providers. The project started in December 2007. The ELF began by contacting major European airlines to establish their individual oxygen policies. As was experienced by Walters *et al.*<sup>1</sup> this was a difficult task because very few airlines had the information available on their websites or details of whom to contact. Telephone calls proved the most successful method of information retrieval, although an assertive telephone manner was often necessary for airlines to take notice of our request. This gave us first-hand insight into the difficulties that patients face when trying to organise travel arrangements.

The ELF Air Travel Database was launched in September 2008 and by August 2009 was available in eight languages.<sup>2</sup> It contains the relevant contact information and individual oxygen policies of over 300 major airlines in Europe. To date, it has received over 13,000 unique visitors, with English, German and Greek versions used most frequently. The airlines are now contacted on a regular basis to check for any policy alterations, thus ensuring the site is up to date. The Air Travel Database is freely available via the ELF website<sup>2</sup> and we hope that it will prove to be a useful tool for clinicians advising patients about fitness to fly, and a valuable resource for patients with respiratory disease planning air travel.

We therefore encourage your readers to use the website, which is readily available and provides up-to-date information.

### Conflict of interest declaration

None to declare.

### References

1. Walters G, James A, Gill S, Banerjee D. Airline acceptability of CPAP: is relevant information available on airlines' websites? *Prim Care Respir J* 2010;19:87-88. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4104/pcrj.2010.00007>
2. European Lung Foundation. Air travel database. Available from [www.airtravel.european-lung-foundation.org](http://www.airtravel.european-lung-foundation.org) (Date last updated: February 2010, date last accessed: March 2010)