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Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Whilst the article by Nicholson AN¹ comprehensively reviews medical and environmental stresses associated with commercial flight, recent widespread increase in press coverage and community perceptions regarding compromised flight safety and security require emphasis. Adverse psychological sequelae resulting from terrorist threat to passenger aircraft leads to avoidance of commercial flights² as well as stress and anxiety in flight.³ There is now community-wide anxiety about flight security in view of recent terrorist attacks such as commercial jets being flown into The Twin Towers in New York City on September 11th 2001² and more recent security fears on trans-Atlantic flights.⁴ Psychological stresses associated with increased pre-departure security checks and flights delayed or cancelled by security concerns have increased since September 11th.³ One country's involvement in the 1988 mid-air bomb explosion of a Pan-Am flight over Lockerbie was widely speculated at the time and highlighted further in 2001.⁵ Air-rage (passengers being verbally or physically aggressive or disruptive during flight) related to substance and alcohol use/refusal is increasing, poses physical and psychological risks to others on the plane and occasionally requires costly and inconvenient diversion of the flight.⁶ Passengers with flight anxiety who already have fears out of proportion to the excellent safety of commercial flight pre-September 11th⁷ will now have to contend with random unpredictable acts of violence and terrorism.

Fear of flying possesses significant public health implication,⁷ affecting 10-40% of adult passengers⁸

and up to 9.2% of crew staff.⁹ In extreme cases it leads to severe anxiety reactions including panic attacks in-flight.³ On the ground, avoiding flights exposes individuals to risks associated with using alternative transport.⁷

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