

Lessons from Abroad

[By Dr. William DeMayo, MD.](#)

As most readers already know, this fall I took a position working in Abu Dhabi, which is part of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). I accepted a unique opportunity with Capital Health, as the Director of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, developing their first inpatient rehabilitation hospital. This Specialized Rehabilitation Hospital (www.ch-srh.ae) will be a model of care for the United Arab Emirates and the Gulf region. As such, my posts to this network have been few in the past 6 months. I thought I would start up again by sharing some of the many new perspectives that I have gained.

After 30 years of practicing Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation in the United States, I am astounded at the new insights I am having by simply looking at life and patient related issues from a different angle. I hope that these perspectives are not only interesting but also help Polio survivors and caregivers take a step back in their own situations to gain new perspective. It is a simple fact of the human condition that we get used to approaching problems, concerns and difficulties from a consistent point of view – that can be good sometimes and other times it can restrict our thinking. Spirituality has always been important to address in my work with patients. This is what allows us to “step out of ourselves” and break restrictive thoughts and emotions.

The culture and health care in the UAE is clearly very different and will provide many potential challenges to our thinking. At the same time, I have also been struck by how human nature is human nature. The saying “We are all the same and we are all different,” is true on many levels. It is my hope that as you read this and the articles I plan to write in the next few months, you will try to not focus on the fact that the UAE is half way around the world but rather let it become part of *your* world which you have not yet explored – like a previously unopened box in the attic with family treasures that take us to a different place of thinking.

Certainly, what I have learned in 5 months can't be condensed into one article so I will provide an outline of sorts for future articles and modify as we go along. I must start by admitting that I had NO IDEA about the United Arab Emirates (UAE) prior to my investigations over last summer so no one should feel embarrassed by not knowing where it is on the map. Secondly, I think it is important to share some of the cultural issues here since they will impact much of what I discuss.

These are the subjects I would like to write about as we move forward into the next few months.

1. Overview of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE)
2. Cultural issues and dramatic growth in the UAE and how they impact health care
3. Current status of health care and Rehabilitation Medicine in the UAE.
4. Accessibility issues and services for “People of Determination” in the UAE.
5. Rehabilitation Vision – moving forward in helping the UAE develop world class services.



Lessons from Abroad (Part 1)

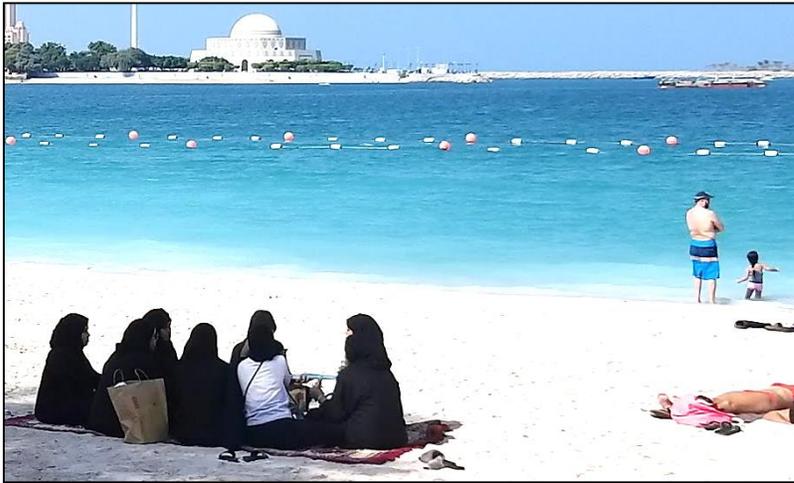
An Overview of the Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE)

[Dr. William DeMayo, MD.](#)

- The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federal monarchy on the Persian Gulf with Oman to the East and Saudi Arabia to the South. Marine borders include Qatar to the west and Iran to the North.
- Abu Dhabi is the capital of the UAE which is the most westernized of the Arabic countries.
- Second most populated city in the UAE, after Dubai (1.5 hr. drive away).
- Population (Only 20% are citizens).
 - UAE Nationals - 0.5 Million
 - Non-Nationals - 2.25 Million
- There are more than 2,000 parks and 10 km of public beaches here.
- The Louvre Abu Dhabi opened in 2017 and the Guggenheim is pending.
- Inexpensive bike share stations are throughout the city.
- Four of the top ten Seven star hotels are in Abu Dhabi or in nearby Dubai.
- Popular outdoor activities include beach sports, boating, biking, camping and desert activities
- Abu Dhabi is extremely safe, even late at night.
 - 1) Non-nationals that commit crimes are deported, unemployment is extremely low, and drug laws are very strict.
 - 2) Claims to the [safest city on the planet](#).
- Taxis are everywhere and extremely inexpensive - a 2 mile cab ride will cost about \$3.
- The local currency (the Dirham) is tied directly to the US dollar so there is no concern about fluctuating exchange rates.
- NYU Abu Dhabi - almost 40 Acres and can accommodate 2,600 students.
- Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi is an amazing 364 bed facility and has centers of excellence in Heart/Vascular, Neuro, GI, Eye, and Respiratory/Critical Care. (They do not have inpatient rehabilitation).
- Language
 - Arabic is the official language but English is the business language and almost everyone speaks at least some English. Most signage is in both languages (they even have Hardees, Dunkin Donuts and Applebees)!
- Religion
 - 1) The UAE is clearly an Islamic country that respects people of all faiths.
 - 2) The government in Abu Dhabi has spent millions in constructing and renovating churches.
- Alcohol
 - 1) Laws generally allow expatriates to drink but protect local heritage.
 - 2) Expatriates may apply for a license to purchase and consume alcohol.
 - 3) UAE national citizens and individuals identified as Muslim on their passport are not eligible for this license.
 - 4) Drinking and driving laws are very strict as are laws for drug abuse with a zero tolerance enforcement so people take a taxi after one glass of wine.



- The cost of living in Abu Dhabi is surprisingly low.
 - 1) Rent tends to be high but many other costs are very low including any service related cost.
 - 2) Overall, the cost of living is 35 % lower than New York City.
- Dress
 - 1) Emirate citizens wear traditional dress.
 - 2) Many expatriates (those living in Abu Dhabi who are from other countries) wear dress from their home country.
 - 3) U.S. expatriates will generally not dress differently than they would at home when in most areas of the city including the beaches.
 - 4) Beach attire or very revealing clothes outside the beach area will be frowned upon.
 - 5) Out of respect for the local population when at the malls, the shoulders should be covered and short shorts avoided.
 - 6) Government buildings and Mosques have strict dress codes, which those of us who are non-residents must honor.



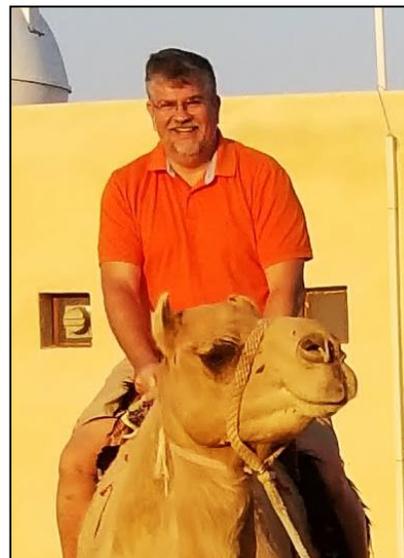
I took this photo at the beach – it's easy to see who the Abu Dhabi nationals are.



When we visited the Grand Mosque, my wife dressed as required for women – arms, legs and head covered. Men have it easier !



Abu Dhabi is a clean and very modern city, right on the Persian Gulf.



I thought **I** was going to need a Rehabilitation Physician after spending an afternoon on a camel !