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Couple's trauma after body placed next to them on flight

3 hours ago

Maia Davies

BBC News

Watch: Mitchell Ring and Jennifer Colin speak to A Current Affair about the flight

An Australian couple have spoken of the "traumatic" moment the body of a dead passenger was placed next to them on a Qatar Airways flight.

Mitchell Ring and Jennifer Colin, who were travelling to Venice for a dream holiday, told Australia's Channel 9 a woman had died in the aisle beside them during the flight from Melbourne to Doha.

The couple say cabin crew placed her corpse, covered in blankets, next to Mr Ring for the remaining four hours of the flight without offering to move him, despite there being empty seats.

Qatar Airways said it apologised for "any inconvenience or distress this incident may have caused", adding that it was in the process of contacting passengers.

The couple said they had not been contacted or offered support by Qatar Airways or Qantas, the airline through which they booked the flight.

They said there should be a protocol to ensure passengers onboard were looked after in such situations.

'Duty of care'

Mr Ring told Channel Nine's Current Affair programme that staff had responded "in no time" when the woman collapsed, but that "unfortunately the lady couldn't be saved, which was pretty heart-breaking to watch".

He said the cabin crew had tried to move her body towards business class "but she was quite a large lady and they couldn't get her through the aisle".

Mr Ring said the crew had seen seats were available beside him.

"They said, 'Can you move over please?' and I just said, 'Yes no problem'.

"Then they placed the lady in the chair I was in."

While Ms Colin was able to move to an empty seat nearby, Mr Ring said he had not been given the option to do so by cabin crew - even though there were vacant seats.

When the plane landed four hours later, he said passengers were asked to stay put while medical staff and police came on board.

He said ambulance officers had then started pulling blankets off the woman and he had seen her face.

The couple said there needed to be a "duty of care" for customers and staff.

"We should be contacted to make sure, do you need some support, do you need some counselling?"

Ms Colin called the experience "traumatic" and said: "We totally understand that we can't hold the airline responsible for the poor lady's death, but there has to be a protocol to look after the customers on board."

In a statement, Qatar Airways said: "First and foremost our thoughts are with the family of the passenger who sadly passed away on board our flight.

"We apologise for any inconvenience or distress this incident may have caused, and are in the process of contacting passengers in line with our policies and procedures."

A Qantas spokesperson said: "The process for handling incidents onboard an aircraft like this is managed by the operating airline, which in this case is Qatar Airways."

Barry Eustance, a former Virgin Atlantic captain, said deaths in the air "occur more frequently than people would think" but said as far as he was aware there was no specific protocol in place for such situations.

"On a long haul flight it tends to depend largely on when it occurs and where it occurs and what the crew have in terms of facilities to place the body somewhere because on an aeroplane, there's no access to the hold, there's a crew rest area but that's for the crew so it can be problematical."

A toilet area or galley area could be blocked off, he said, but the crew are required to keep a certain number of toilets available.

Mr Eustance said that, while he was not being judgemental as he did not know the full situation, he was surprised that the crew did not move Mr Ring if there had been spare seats.

"I would expect the crew would do all they could to avoid that. You are creating potential future liabilities in terms of the trauma of the people next to whom the body was placed," he said.

"In my experience the crew would normally try to isolate the body, so there is no passenger exposure to the body and vice versa, for respect and privacy but also for medical reasons. You have a dead body that is uncontained and all that goes with it."

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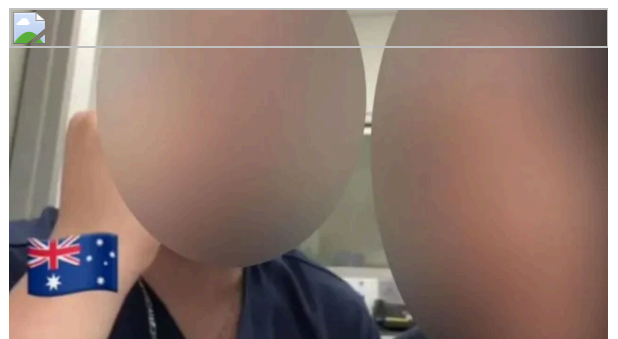


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