

To Your Health!

By Judy Hargis, P.A., and Audeen Wagner



Medical Tourism Traveling for Healthcare and Medical Treatment

Healthcare costs continue to soar and healthcare access for many is nonexistent. This is one of many important issues facing Americans and it is critical that we address it. It feels, to many, like our country has been paralyzed in the healthcare arena by insurance companies, corporate interests and greed. Politicians are slow to act and strongly influenced by lobbyists representing pharmaceutical and insurance companies. We are left to find creative ways to access care for ourselves and our families. There are new options emerging and one is medical tourism. According to the National Coalition on Health care, more than 500,000 Americans traveled abroad to receive medical and dental care in 2006. It is estimated that 45 million Americans are uninsured and 250 million have restricted coverage. There are 150 million without dental insurance. This leaves a huge gap in access and affordability for many. Treatments and surgeries received overseas include hip replacements, heart surgeries, cancer treatments and fertility workups. Medical tourism has proven to be a viable option not only for Americans but for people worldwide. For many individuals it is the only option to get needed treatment without devastating their savings. Many middle class Americans are struggling to make ends meet and have no way to cover even routine preventive care, acute or chronic medical problems or much needed surgeries.

Medical tourism is defined as the practice of traveling to other countries to receive medical attention. It has evolved over many years. Originally it was an option for individuals seeking alternative care. Ten years ago it was largely utilized for elective or cosmetic surgeries. Today it has become a viable option for major and lifesaving surgeries. In the recent past, medical tourism was hardly large enough to be noticed. Today, more than 250,000 patients visit Singapore alone, traveling from all over the world.

Medical tourism can reduce healthcare costs significantly. For example, a heart valve surgery that would cost \$100,000 in the U.S. could cost well under \$10,000 overseas.

Even with the travel costs involved including airfare, hotels, car rentals and meals, the cost savings can still be substantial. Some companies are even encouraging employees to seek overseas care for surgeries and some insurance companies are covering portions of this type of care due to the reduced cost to them. It is

worth looking into. Many individuals have been shocked to discover that, even with insurance coverage, they can be slammed with a huge medical bill after a chronic illness or major surgery.

You might be wondering about the quality and safety of care provided overseas. There are obviously inherent dangers in medical care wherever it is received, including the U.S.

It is important to know that the Joint Commission, which accredits health care facilities in the U.S., has an international arm which accredits health care facilities overseas. They have accredited 130 facilities to date. The hospitals that cater to the tourist market are some of the best in the world. Many are staffed by physicians who have been trained at major medical centers in the U.S. and Europe. Physicians in these facilities are supported by more RNs and ancillary staff than many western facilities, improving nurse to patient ratios. In some facilities the ratio can be one nurse to one patient when more complicated surgeries have been performed. Top destinations include Thailand, India and Singapore. Bangkok's Bumrungrad Hospital has more than 200 physicians who are board certified in the U.S. and one of Singapore's major hospitals is a branch of the prestigious Johns Hopkins University. Escorts Heart Institute and Research Center in New Delhi and Faridabad, India, performs nearly 15,000 heart surgeries a year with a mortality rate of 0.8. This is less than half the mortality rate of most major hospitals in the U.S. In the appropriate settings, the care can be excellent.

Medical tourism appears to be a growing industry and has made a difference in the lives of many Americans. Hopefully, we will reach a point when we will have viable options at home with access to quality, affordable health care for everyone and American culture will support and encourage healthy lifestyles enhanced by access to preventive care, as well. There does not appear to be a perfect solution for many people dealing with health issues and lacking resources to address them, but it is important to know what options we each have as consumers. There are many creative ways to approach our healthcare and reduce costs. This is just one option. The important thing is to be armed with knowledge. Do your research. We are in the midst of a healthcare crisis and there are no easy answers. Chances are good that things will get worse before they improve. In the meantime, we all need to do the best we can to take care of ourselves and our families. This is not an option for everyone but can be helpful for some individuals. If you are interested or want more information about medical tourism there are excellent resources. I have listed a few below.

Books: "Patients Beyond Borders: Everybody's Guide to Affordable World Class Medical Tourism" by Josef Woodman

Articles: "Traveling for Treatment". AARP Bulletin, September 2007

Websites: www.medjourneys.com, www.medretreat.com, www.medicalnomad.com, www.planethospital.com, www.jcpatient-safety.org, www.medexassist.com, www.healthmedical-tourism.com.

As always, we welcome comments and questions. You may contact us c/o The Independent, 725 Bridge St., Vernonia, OR 97064. Email: health@the-independent.net.

Jazzercise offers Personal Touch

Jazzercise instructor Penelope Costley is offering Jazzercise Personal Touch, a personal training program by Jazzercise,

the world's most widely taught dance-fitness program.

This format, created by Jazzercise founder Judi Sheppard Missett, serves as a unique approach to personal training that helps participants get the most from their Jazzercise experience. Certified Jazzercise instructors conduct private sessions designed to improve student success, ensure exercise adherence, and encourage the attainment of fitness goals.

The six-week session begins Monday, October 1; class times are 9:00 a.m. Tuesday and Thursday or 6:30 p.m. Monday and Thursday.

For information call Costley at 503-429-0196.

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