



COSMETIC TOURISM

Cosmetic Tourism is rapidly becoming a multi-million dollar industry. The lure of cheap cosmetic surgery and a holiday in an exotic destination thrown in for less than the price of comparable surgery at home is often too much of a temptation to resist.

The sad fact is most people spend more time anguishing and researching the purchase of their washing machine than their surgeon.

If considering Cosmetic Surgery abroad there are things you should ensure first

- 1) Your Surgeon is well trained and reputable
- 2) That the operation you are having is the right one for you
- 3) That the operation is being performed in a safe environment and any prostheses used (eg breast implants) are of the highest quality
- 4) That appropriate after-care is in place

YOUR SURGEON

Ensure they are a properly trained surgeon who holds an international surgical qualification in Plastic Surgery

- i) A minimum check would be to go to an internationally recognised website such as ISAPS – the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (www.isaps.org). If your surgeon is on this website you can at least ascertain that your surgeon has both an internationally recognised specialist qualification and that his peers in his country of practice feel he is competent. If not on this list you have to dig a bit harder – eg. you could try checking the countries medical register
- ii) Make sure you feel comfortable with your surgeon. If you were in your own country and decided you did not like your surgeon or did not entirely trust him you would simply find another. What would you do in a foreign country with a surgeon you may not have met before and may not even speak your primary language fluently – especially if you have already paid up front to have an operation and are seeing them within a day or two of your surgery

Remember you also want to know about the doctor who is anaesthetising you and keeping you asleep safely during your procedure. They also literally have your life in their hands.

PLANNING AN OPERATION

This is not as easy as it seems. Eg. Many women present wanting breast enlargement when the appropriate operation is a breast lift/tightening procedure or requesting liposuction when a tummy tuck is more appropriate. An inappropriate operation can make your problems worse. A well planned operation will give you a better result and may save you money.

A fundamental problem with medical tourism is that planning and decision making is necessarily rushed. You cannot 'have second thoughts' and when surgery is planned – often without seeing the operating surgeon or seeing them just before the surgery for the first time there is no real time for reflecting on the decision made or any informed consent.

THE OPERATION

Remember Cosmetic Surgery is real surgery. Complications can occur even in the best centres. Travel combined with surgery significantly increases complications especially infections and blood clots. It can also delay their treatment meaning they cause more problem than they might otherwise. Remember that while Cosmetic Surgery trips are often marketed as vacations – vacation activities should be avoided after surgery – sunbathing, drinking alcohol, swimming, jet skiing, taking extensive tours by bus or foot – can all compromise wound healing and increase infection rates and other problems.

MEDICAL DEVICES USED

If you are having breast enlargement surgery you want to know the best and safest implants are used. In New Zealand and Australia quality implants themselves cost A\$2000 to A\$3500 a pair – note this is the cost of the implants themselves from the manufacturers and does not include the costs of the surgery itself.

Travel companies may also exaggerate the costs of having surgery in Australia or New Zealand. Always check that the information you have been given is accurate and not misleading.

AFTER-CARE

After a cosmetic operation (except small ones) you normally stay in hospital (not a hotel) for good reason. While many things that can go wrong happen in the first 48hours (eg. excess bleeding) there are also many things that occur a fortnight (infections) or even a couple of months (wound healing and scar problems) after surgery.

What would you do in the case of these problems? What if you need any revision surgery. What is you are unhappy with the outcome of surgery?

Revision surgery can be difficult at the best of times. As cosmetic surgery is often individualised it is more difficult to perform revision surgical when there are uncertainties over the surgical technique that has been used.

In 2006 ASAPS reported treating 36 people with complications arising from medical tourism on return to Australia. These are only the ones reported by ASAPS members. Many go unreported, are treated by other medical facilities or simply accept poor outcomes.

Revision surgery is often complex and outcomes often compromised. A revision can often be more expensive than the original surgery.

SUMMARY

It is your body and your life – you only have one. Make your decisions wisely and with care

- Check out the person promoting the surgery. Are they medically trained. Do they accept any liability or provide any help if problems arise or are they simply a ‘travel agent’
- ensure your surgeon is appropriately qualified
- ensure you trust your surgeon
- ensure you are being operated on in appropriate facilities and the other staff are appropriately trained. Do they speak your native language or you theirs?
- ensure you have been properly informed about your operation – that you know the alternatives, that the operation will achieve what you are wanting it to and you understand the possible complications
- check out the costs and ensure the money paid is appropriate
- make sure you know what prostheses are being used

- ensure you have an adequate aftercare plan - do you know what to do if things go wrong once you have returned home?