

Surgery abroad without NHS referral

NHS Scotland does not recommend choosing to pay to travel abroad for surgery as part of a packaged holiday. This is sometimes called surgical or cosmetic tourism.

Surgical options in Scotland can appear more expensive. But you should think about the potential savings against the potential risks of travelling for surgery.

Decisions about surgery

The most important decision to make about any operation is whether it is the right one for you.

You should always talk to the surgeon who would carry out your operation about the best way to get the results you want.

To help you make an informed choice, you should ask:

- what are the benefits?
- what are the risks?
- what are the alternatives?
- what if I do nothing?

[Read more about asking the right questions](#)

Many clinics abroad do not offer a consultation with your surgeon until the day of surgery. This does not allow enough time for you to make decisions. You should have time to think about what was said, and to decide what's right for you.

A common alternative offered by these clinics is an appointment with an advisor. The advisor may or may not be medically qualified. This is unsafe, as the only person who can advise you properly is the surgeon who will operate.

You may also be offered video consultations. Video consultations do not allow for a proper physical examination, which is key to deciding the best operation for you. In the UK, the medical regulators (General Medical Council) require a face-to-face consultation before planning cosmetic surgery.

Packages of care

You should fully understand what's included in any private treatment package, either at home or abroad.

The operation is only one part of treatment. You'll need routine care before and after the actual operation. NHS Scotland is under no obligation to provide this.

This Practice will NOT provide specialist follow up care after private surgery.

Complications of having surgery abroad

Most surgical procedures go well but there can always be complications. You should understand what's included in your treatment package in the event of complications.

One cause of problems after surgery abroad is the holiday that comes with the surgical package. A key part of recovery after surgery is rest. Taking part in activities such as swimming and sunbathing can have a negative effect on healing.

You should not fly soon after surgery as the risks of clots in the legs is much greater. It's possible for clots in the legs to spread to the lungs, which can be life threatening.

NHS Scotland recommend you do not fly for:

- 5 to 7 days after procedures such as breast surgery and liposuction
- 7 to 10 days after facial cosmetic procedures or tummy tucks (or any abdominal surgery)

NHS Scotland will always provide emergency care where needed. But there's no obligation for NHS Scotland to provide further routine treatment. It's important that you know where to go for the routine care needed before and after your operation, and in the event of any complications.

Why does UK treatment cost more?

The benefit of using UK services if you're choosing to pay for treatment is that hospitals and clinics are all regulated. This means that they may appear to be more expensive than abroad. But you do not have the reassurance that services outside the UK are regularly inspected. Meeting regulatory requirements comes at a cost, and contributes to the relatively higher price of UK treatment.

Also, most UK centres provide all required aftercare as a part of the package, including follow up visits with your surgeon. In the event of complications, your surgeon is available to deal with any issues if they happen.

You should ask what is included in any package abroad compared with one available locally. All extra care before and after surgery should be provided. Any tests or appointments not included within the original package of care you pay for may prove more expensive to buy later as extras.

Recommendation

Choosing to pay to travel abroad for surgery is not recommended by NHS Scotland, or by the surgical specialist associations in the UK.

If you still wish to do this, be aware that NHS Scotland is under no obligation to provide pre and post-operative care other than emergency care.



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