

Pensioner saves £5,000 by having knee surgery in Indian hospital

by **Barry Nelson (Exclusive) Thursday 18th May 2006**

A RETIRED schoolteacher saved almost £5,000 by travelling thousands of miles to have knee surgery in an Indian hospital.

Mary Carmichael, 69, from Stockton, could not face waiting months to have surgery on the NHS, so decided to make the 5,000-mile trip.

Yesterday, surgeons at the hospital in Chennai, formerly Madras, reported that the grandmother was doing well.

The operation to replace a knee joint, carried out by a **UK-trained Indian surgeon, cost £2,800** compared to an estimated £8,000 it would have cost in the private sector in Britain.

The total cost of Mrs Carmichael's trip, including flights, meals and accommodation in a private room, was £3,300.

News of the latest Briton to travel abroad for major surgery comes in the week that the European Court of Justice ruled that patients must be reimbursed for treatment abroad if they face an undue delay for surgery at home.

Yvonne Watts, from Bedford, took the case to Europe after her local primary care trust declined to reimburse her for having a hip operation privately in **France at a cost of £4,000**. The ruling could put new financial pressures on the NHS, which is said to be updating guidance to healthcare staff in the light of the ruling.

Mrs Carmichael contacted The Taj Medical Group, based in the UK, and asked about the costs of knee surgery.

The group, which has sent about 500 Britons to India for treatments, told Mrs Carmichael she could be operated on with minimum delay at a modern, **well-equipped hospital in Chennai**, on the south-east coast.

Mrs Carmichael flew from Teesside to India via Heathrow.

The former teacher was accompanied on her 10,000-mile round-trip by her husband, George.

Dr Jagdish Jethwa, a director of the Taj Medical Group, said: "She is doing really well. She will be going back home at the end of the month. She had the operation last week."

The operation, which involved implanting an artificial knee joint using minimally invasive surgery, was carried out by UK-trained surgeon **Dr AK Venkatachalam**. **Dr Jethwa said details of the operation would be sent to her GP back home.**