

<http://www.treatmentabroad.net/medical-tourism/travel-for-treatment/hip-replacement-abroad>

When the joints are jumping

How older patients can be helped to get moving again. By Harry Foster.

Several times a week a small group of people, mostly in their 60's and 70's, set off on a trip through the Channel Tunnel to France. Most are moving stiffly and painfully but if you were to catch them coming back a while later you might notice a spring in their step and a look of relief in their eyes.

They are the patients that a Northampton-based agency called **People Logistics** takes for joint replacement surgery to three hospitals in France. Most of them are in constant pain from their knees or hips and have been told that they must wait for up to nine months for an operation on the NHS.



Not only do they recuperate in hospital for two weeks rather than the one week allowed in the UK, but prices for the surgery in hospitals that are the equal of ones in the UK and virtually free of MRSA, are about half what they would be here – £6,500 vs. £12,000 – and that's including transport and accommodation. They go through the Channel Tunnel to avoid risks associated with flying.

Surgery for back and joint problems is one of the most popular reasons for having treatment abroad, after cosmetic surgery. Current estimates are that calls for hip replacements are going to increase by over 60% during the next five years. It's a demand that the NHS seems unlikely to be able to meet.

So for those looking for something even cheaper than what's on offer in France and can face an eight hour plane flight, India is looking increasingly attractive. It has high-class hospitals where knee operations are done for £4,000, including travel and accommodation. At the moment health tourism brings about £170 million into the country and the government is marketing it as a "global health destination."

Already the recent refusal of the UK to perform joint surgery on seriously overweight patients has led to an increase in trips to India for treatments such as spinal fusion, £7,000 vs £20,000 or artificial disc replacement for £6,000, which includes two weeks in hospital and two weeks recovery in a three or four star hotel.

The largest agency in the UK focused on India is the [TajMedical group](#) which has links with 400 doctors and anaesthetists in the subcontinent and so far has arranged trips for 800 people, most of them for orthopedic surgery. It was founded by a couple who have scientific but not medical training; its clients go to five hospitals in India's major cities for most types of elective surgery.

Standards there are said to be as good as private hospitals in the UK. Besides costs, advantages include staff that all speak English and surgeons who have been trained either in the UK or the United States. TajMedical also has links with UK consultants so you can see one before you go and have after-care when you get back. Sample prices include £2,000 for breast enlargement.

Catherine Ankers had been an invalid for seven years and was becoming increasingly desperate to find a solution when TajMedical sent her to India. She'd only been 16 when she badly damaged her right leg in fall while training to be a dance teacher.

"Doctors couldn't work out what was wrong," she says. "I was put on epilepsy drugs, my hip was paralysed with botox but still I couldn't walk without crutches. Then TajMedical arranged for my trip. Within a couple of days the hospital had worked out what was wrong and fitted a brace for my hip which allowed me to walk again. It only cost £2,000 I've got my life back".

Some people worry that there is an exploitative element to medical tourism in India; rich westerners taking up capacity that could otherwise be used to treat the poor in the local population. But Jaslok hospital in Bombay, which specialises in orthopedic surgery, is an example of the charitable aspect to the system. It has a total of 376 beds of which only 12 are devoted to foreign patients, but the extra fees they generate pay for 51 beds that are made available free to the poor and 87 beds charged at reduced rates. It's one of a number of Indian hospitals that BUPA has approved for patients to go to. For details of the other hospitals that it will fund see <http://bupa.wordtravels.com/Travelguide/Countries/India/Overview>.

One of the emerging destinations for joint surgery that is rather closer to home is Poland. The Jagiellonian University in Krakow specialises in orthopedics and has a very good physiotherapy unit; patients usually stay for several weeks and receive much more extensive treatment during their recovery period than they would in the UK. Details about costs – similar to France – can be found at <http://www.barbarathurgood.com>.

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