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Health

Why back injury boy must fly to India for cure

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A mother whose son was crippled by an ice skating injury is flying him to India for an operation after being told he would have to wait a year for NHS treatment.

Karen Knott was so tortured by seeing 14-year-old Elliot's pain that she decided to splash out £6,000 for the trip and the cost of surgery in New Delhi.

Elliot, who was captain of his swimming team in West Dorset, is suffering from spondylolisthesis, a condition which developed after he injured his back. It is caused when a vertebra slips out of line and presses on a nerve.

He can barely stand and has to be helped around his home near Dorchester.

He was due to begin his GCSE courses next term but has had to stop attending classes because of the pain.

His local hospital does not carry out the procedure and referred him to Southampton General Hospital.

But since the referral Elliot has not been seen by a doctor. He was told he would have to wait 17 weeks for an appointment then at least nine months for an operation.

His parents, who are both design engineers for Westland Helicopters, inquired about going private, but it would have cost about £25,000. Instead, they discovered that the operation could be carried out in India for £4,700.

Elliot and his mother fly out on Tuesday and will be there for 18 days.

Mrs Knott is appalled by the irony of the situation when many new doctors in Britain are unable to find positions in hospitals because there are not enough training places.

The British Medical Association claims that up to 2,000 doctors will not be able to find jobs in 2005.

'It is like everything now and

is run by accountants,' she said of the NHS. Since he fell, Elliot just got worse and worse until he had to stay home from school.

'He has to be helped round the house. It is the worst age for something like this to happen. He is still growing and active and about to start his GCSEs. He wants to be out with his friends, not stuck indoors.' Mrs Knott, who has another son, Ryan, ten, has arranged the operation through **the Taj Medical group**.

The price includes hospital accommodation for herself and their flights have cost £1,300.

'It is a fraction of the cost of going private,' said Mrs Knott. 'We had saved some money to have our home re-thatched, but that will have to wait.'

'This operation ought to be available on the NHS. Of course Elliot is delighted that he will soon be back at school, but he shouldn't have had to wait so long.'

'It has been very difficult to get anything out of Southampton Hospital.' A spokesman from Southampton General Hospital, where Elliot is being seen, said: 'I understand how frustrating this is for people. Even though our waiting times are within the national levels it is difficult when you are the person affected.'

'Staff who have these specialised skills are in short supply and a lot of their time is taken up with emergency cases.'

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