

# WILL EMPLOYEES RECEIVE TREATMENT IN THE USA OR ABROAD?



Recently North Carolina-based Blue Ridge Paper Products Inc. wanted to send its employee Carl Garrett to India for two surgeries. He would have saved his company \$50,000 and they would have given him \$10,000 back as a share of the savings. But it did not happen as Garrett's union, the United Steelworkers (USW), stopped it. They claim that they do not want their members to be endangered by treatments in third-world countries. Nevertheless, this triggered a big interest in treatment abroad. Various companies are now thinking about sending their employees abroad to receive medical treatment. The reason is the cost of medical care in the USA.

The quality of medical care in the USA is one of the highest in the world but also one of the most expensive. According to Blue Ridge Paper Products Inc. Benefits Director Bonnie Blackley, hospitals in the USA have a monopoly, but now more and more people travel to countries like Thailand or India for medical treatment. Even some insurance companies offer treatment abroad. For example Insurers Health Net of California already contracts with medical clinics on the Mexico side of the US border.

But what if something goes wrong after the treatment? Partly, the high cost of medical care in the USA is explained by the level of insurance that doctors have to pay. USW President Leo Gerard claims: When you're there, you give up your legal rights that you have here. You can't sue if there's malpractice. Who would send their 7-year-old child or their 80-year-old grandmother to a foreign country for surgery and you couldn't do anything if something goes wrong?

The experts are worried that medical tourism in fact worsens the situation in the U.S. health industry, and others are worried that voluntary medical tourism could change to become mandatory. Blue Ridge Paper Products Inc. did not succeed in sending Carl Garrett abroad but it has opened the door to other companies to do so.

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