

# Medical Tourism Growing in Popularity in the U.S.



More and more Americans are travelling abroad to receive medical treatment, mainly to developing countries such as Costa Rica, India and Singapore, as prices there are much cheaper than in the US. This "medical tourism" is on the increase, but for many individuals it is not really affordable. However, as health insurance costs continue to rise in the US, some employers are sending their employees abroad to receive medical treatment.

In the US, physicians have to pay high insurance premiums to protect themselves against possible lawsuits for malpractices and this adds to the high cost of treatment. People are travelling abroad not only for cheap cosmetic surgery but also for heart surgery and transplants, for dental care and for hip or knee replacements (India and Singapore are popular destinations for these latter treatments). Patients willing to pay for cosmetic and reconstructive surgery travel to South Africa.

Medical treatment in these countries can cost 30 to 80 percent less than it does in the US. The quality is often the same and, according to some experts, in certain cases it could even be better. Nevertheless, not all Americans are fond of the idea going abroad for medical treatment. Last year Blue Ridge Paper Products, a self-insured firm in Canton, N.C wanted to send an employee to India for rotator cuff and gall bladder surgery. The employee agreed and was promised a 25 percent share of the savings of the surgeries, but problems arose when the United Steelworkers Union intervened and raised a number of objections to the proposal.

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