

# MEDICAL TOURISM IN FRANCE: THE CALAIS PHENOMENON AND RESTRAINTS



Every year medical tourism is becoming more and more popular, as people travel for treatment or even surgeries to different countries. France is one of the countries that is opening up to this phenomenon, as it represents potential additional revenue. Unique of its kind, the hospital center of Calais has made treatment of foreigners a specialty, with British patients arriving in masses.

Calais is a facility that does not meet any of the criteria expected from a hospital center with international influence. The establishment is smart but modest with 150 million euros of turnover. It has no academic credential or advanced technical platform. However, hundreds of patients from England, Northern Ireland or Scotland arrived here for treatment last year.

## **British patients coming in large numbers**

On the other side of the Channel, the lack of capacity causes endless waiting lines. **About 13% of patients are not operated within four and a half months set by the government.** Potentially one influenza outbreak could make the medical system collapse.

In 2016 a partnership agreement was signed between the Calais hospital and the Social Security Fund of the South of England, an establishment integrated into the National Health Service. This allows the hospital to better utilize the equipment. It was rebuilt in 2012 with capacities that are superior to local needs.

Calais is the only French institution to be directly connected to the NHS information system for the remote transmission of medical records and reimbursements. It is remunerated like any English hospital. Unlike their French counterparts, British patients do not pay neither the daily rate of service nor user fees, just transportation costs. In case of rehospitalization for complications, the price is included in the package paid to the hospital.

## **Germany in the viewfinder**

For some time now medical tourism in France and elsewhere is no longer a taboo. In 2014, it was predicted that a turnover of 2 billion euros could be achieved, with France possibly catching up with Germany, one of the most popular medical tourism destinations in Europe.

However, there is a long way to go. According to data, the number of foreigners in French hospitals has not increased since 2014. They represent less than 1% of all the patients. Experts insist that medical tourism will remain a modest business.

“Our care is as good as it is in Germany, but we are not equipped to produce the detailed invoices that Gulf clients require. And we cannot make discounts like in private companies. We need a decree of the general manager to change our billing,” one of the representatives of a hospital in Paris said.

**Moreover, medical tourism in France is governed by bilateral agreements between countries, or simply by the law of the market.** It is a problem within the European Union but potential patients from the Maghreb or the Gulf, as well as increasingly from sub-Saharan Africa are

more demanding. Either there are bilateral agreements between health insurance funds, or the patients pay treatment from their own pocket. Rates are freely set by the care facility, which usually requires the payment in advance.

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