

U.S.: MEDICAL TOURISM GUIDE



It is one of the worst kept secrets in the world that the United States do not have an adequate medical service accessible to all social strata. One of the results is that numerous wealthier people tend to travel abroad to receive medical care. The most common reasons for medical tourism involve open heart surgery and joint replacements. This is why the American Medical Association (AMA) has now introduced the first ever guide to medical tourism, concerned with the safety of patients who travel overseas for medical

treatment.

This branch of tourism is, admittedly, small in the United States yet the trend is growing and deserves the attention of the authorities. It has been outlined that tourists must be aware of many things which some take for granted. Specifically, there are extra risks involved when patients connect travel with operations. For example, when they fly back to the USA, there is the added risk of blood clots forming in the operated part of the body. Secondly, patients and passengers must understand that going on medical trips is purely voluntary and that the American government is in no way responsible for their actions or damage.

Some say that the simple outcome of such guidelines is that the American government urgently needs to address the problem of the insufficient health care system in the United States before turning to issues abroad.

Among the basic principles advocated by AMA are:

1. Medical care outside of the U.S. must be voluntary.
2. Financial incentives to travel outside the U.S. for medical care should not inappropriately limit the diagnostic and therapeutic alternatives that are offered to patients, or restrict treatment or referral options.
3. Patients should only be referred for medical care to institutions that have been accredited by recognized international accrediting bodies (e.g., the Joint Commission International or the International Society for Quality in Health Care).
4. Prior to travel, local follow-up care should be coordinated and financing should be arranged to ensure continuity of care when patients return from medical care outside the US.
5. Coverage for travel outside the U.S. for medical care must include the costs of necessary follow-up care upon return to the U.S.
6. Patients should be informed of their rights and legal recourse prior to agreeing to travel outside the U.S. for medical care.
7. Access to physician licensing and outcome data, as well as facility accreditation and outcomes data, should be arranged for patients seeking medical care outside the U.S.
8. The transfer of patient medical records to and from facilities outside the U.S. should be consistent with HIPAA guidelines.
9. Patients choosing to travel outside the U.S. for medical care should be provided with information about the potential risks of combining surgical procedures with long flights and vacation activities.

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