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SAFETY LAWYERS WARN OF SURGERY RISKS ABROAD

With more and more Britons travelling abroad for cheap surgery, a leading lawyers group has issued a safety warning about the risks involved.

Denise Kitchener, chief executive of the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL), has urged people to think twice before going under the knife in a foreign country.


“Travelling abroad for medical treatment is becoming increasingly popular as it can prove much cheaper,” she said, “but patients need to be aware of the risks involved, the need for additional insurance and the difficulties with legal representation if anything were to go wrong.”

The trend known as ‘medical tourism’ is the rapidly-growing practice of travelling across international borders to obtain cheaper health care, whether it be cosmetic surgery or more complex procedures such as cardiac surgery and joint replacement.

But not all patients get the results they want, with many returning to the UK after ‘botched’ surgery. Englishman Donovan Sampson flew out to South Africa for a tummy-tuck and suffered serious complications.

“I really wanted to lose weight and I was on holiday when I saw an advert for surgery. I was tempted by the price – just £800 – which was ridiculously cheap and should have got alarm bells ringing, but it didn’t,” he said.

“I was wooed by the surgeon who told me it was a simple operation and I didn’t ask enough questions to find out what I was letting myself in for.



“When I returned back to the UK I developed septicaemia and had to be rushed to hospital for life-saving surgery. I have been left with a scar that goes round my body.

“If I had known the complications and costs that followed £800, would not have seemed so cheap. My life has changed and I’ve lost confidence.”

Injury lawyers say key concerns with travelling for complicated procedures include communication problems, as people are not always able to see the surgeon beforehand and some patients fly back too soon, which can be a health risk and lead to complications and infections.

APIL’s safety warning has been supported by the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS). Douglas McGeorge, president of the organisation, said: “Individuals have no idea of the standards of care in the country they are visiting and no knowledge of the abilities or experience of the surgeon. Complications occur and are usually left to the British system to treat.”

Research* has revealed that over a third of patients also fail to check if their insurance will cover the procedure. Without adequate insurance patients may find it difficult to prove an injury claim if anything goes wrong, as they will usually be governed by foreign laws and legal costs could prove expensive.

Denise Kitchener said travelling abroad for surgery is a complete lottery.

“My advice to people would be not to do it, but if they are adamant then they should do their research first,” she said. “They should find a reputable surgeon, make sure aftercare is available and confirm that they can see a surgeon post-operation when back in the UK.”

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Note to editors:

- For more information, contact:
Michael Johns, Assistant Press & PR officer, APIL, t: 0115 9388702
- Mike Saul is a partner at TJJ Solicitors, Manchester, and specialises in helping victims of negligent cosmetic surgery and treatments.
- *Source: Post Office Travel Services 'Medical tourists need to mind the gap' 19/03/2008.
Link:http://www.news.royalmailgroup.com/news/article.asp?id=2186&brand=Post_Office_network
- Request for details of case study should be directed to Lisa Wardle
- APIL (Association of Personal Injury Lawyers) was established in 1990 by a group of lawyers working on behalf of personal injury victims and now has more than 4,500 members. APIL campaigns for improvements in the law to help people who are injured or become ill through no fault of their own
- Further information can also be found at the organisation's website - www.apil.org.uk