

British health case studies

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Case 1: Russ Aiton

'I'm sorry to say that Third World standards are what we now find in British hospitals'

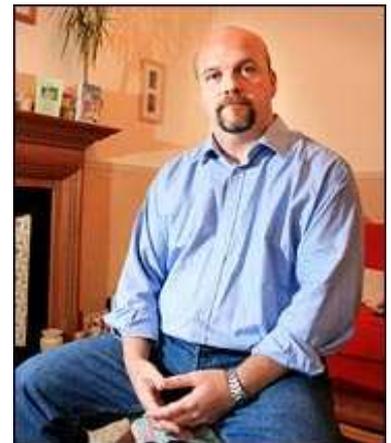
When Russ Aiton was told he had the choice of an agonisingly long wait for a heart bypass on the NHS, or a bill of between £17,000 and £24,000 to have it done privately, he turned to the internet in frustration.

Within minutes Mr Aiton and his wife Joy had found a company that would get him the surgery within weeks for a fraction of the cost, 5,000 miles away in India.

Despite his long-standing loyalty to the NHS – he used to work for Sheffield Children's Hospital as a management consultant and Mrs Aiton still works for the service as an occupational therapist – Mr Aiton felt he had no choice but to go overseas. He now says it was the best decision of his life.

"I was diagnosed 18 months ago with heart disease and chronic atrial fibrillation – an irregular heartbeat – and my condition soon began to worse," he said.

"I couldn't walk up stairs, I couldn't travel for my work, I couldn't lift anything and I was putting on weight. Effectively I was in heart failure. But when I found out I would have to wait several months for an operation, despite my consultant at Aberdeen hospital saying I needed an urgent heart bypass, Joy and I decided we had to go private. When we looked at the cost of the operation in the UK we started considering going abroad."



Russ Aiton says going abroad was the best decision of his life

The Taj Medical Group, which Mr Aiton found with Google, quoted him £7,800 for a package of treatment, including all the medical costs of the operation and aftercare at the Wockhardt Hospital in Bangalore, return flights for both him and his wife, 14 nights' hospital accommodation and 13 nights' recuperation at a country club.

While the price was attractive, Mr Aiton, a health and safety consultant, was still nervous about the prospect of travelling to what he thought of as a Third World country for major surgery.

He began to research the record of the Wockhardt and discovered the hospital carried out 500 bypasses a year, compared with 200 at a typical UK hospital. "That gave me a lot of confidence and we decided to go for it," he said.

On checking into the Wockhardt last month, Mr Aiton was subjected to a number of tests, given a treatment plan and only then asked for a deposit payment, the balance being paid once the operation had been carried out.

Mr Aiton, 43, said he now felt like a different man. "I've been given a new lease of life and I feel bloody marvellous. I'm back into my work and I've lost two stone. It's only now I realise just how sick I was."

Now back home in Carnoustie, near Dundee, Mr Aiton says he was amazed by the high standard of care he received in India.

"Nothing was too much trouble for the staff. The care, the cleanliness and the attention to detail were all excellent. There was no comparison to my treatment in Britain, where I felt like a lump of meat on the production line."

As health professionals, Mr Aiton and his wife were both struck by the contrast between the standards of hygiene in the Bangalore hospital and those in the UK.

"When we flew back from India we arrived to the news that 90 people in this country had been killed by *Clostridium difficile*. We were stunned. In the Wockhardt they had never had a case of either MRSA or *C. diff*."

"The wards were spotless. They had three separate teams to clean the floors, change the beds and change patients' water. Nobody could approach your bed without cleaning their hands and in the intensive care unit everyone had to go through a three-stage procedure of changing their clothes, putting on gowns and washing their hands with an alcohol rub."

Following his experience abroad, Mr Aiton has arrived at a damning assessment of the state of the NHS.

"I'm sorry to say Third World standards are what we now find in British hospitals. I'm afraid we've regressed. We've become obsessed with targets and it makes me very angry," he said.

Case 2: Mary Auchterlonie

'For us, being able to get the very best treatment was the crucial factor'

For Keith Auchterlonie, flying his wife to Madras for hip surgery was a good use of Air Miles clocked up through a busy career.

Housewife Mary, aged 59, had consulted both NHS and private doctors in Scotland to seek surgery to ease her excruciating pain. She was offered a total hip replacement – available quickly privately, or on the National Health Service, if she was prepared to wait slightly longer.

But research on the internet alerted the Fife couple to less invasive techniques that would offer Mrs Auchterlonie far more mobility and a quicker recovery time.

The catch was that no local hospitals offered the procedure, called "hip resurfacing". In fact, the more that the couple looked on the web, the more they found themselves looking further afield.

Internet sites on the topic repeatedly led them to the work of Dr Vijay Bose (pictured, far right, with Mrs Auchterlonie and a nurse), a surgeon based in Madras who specialised in the operation.

Mr Auchterlonie, a consultant in public relations, said: "We had to think about it seriously, but in

the end it wasn't a difficult decision.

"We realised that we could get world-class treatment at a much lower price than in the UK. For us, being able to get the very best treatment was the crucial factor".

They contacted Dr Bose, who carried out a consultation via email.

Three weeks ago they flew to India; a day later Mrs Auchterlonie entered the overseas patients' ward of the Apollo Hospital to undergo treatment. On arrival, she was screened to see if she carried the superbug MRSA – a procedure that will not be introduced into the NHS until next year.

Her husband said: "From the moment we got there we were impressed.

"The ward was newly built and dedicated to overseas patients. The room was cleaned from top to bottom twice a day, and whenever the doctors and nurses went near Mary they always used the hand scrubs."

The care from doctors and nurses was incredible, added Mrs Auchterlonie.

"They really couldn't do enough. We met the consultant every day, and the nurses would flock around you checking everything was all right."

With flights taken care of via Air Miles, collected via years of business travel, the healthcare bill facing the couple was £4,000 – a third of the price offered in the UK by those few private hospitals offering the treatment.

On top of that, the couple spent £700 on a week's stay recuperating in a luxury resort.

Back home in Fife two weeks later, the couple have no regrets.

Mrs Auchterlonie would recommend medical treatment abroad to anyone prepared to do their homework.

But she issued one word of warning: "People get misled by the idea of medical tourism.

"We stayed in a lovely resort after the operation, but this is major surgery, not a holiday."

Case 3: Barry Peters

'I was in a lot of pain'

Barry Peters would have had to endure up to eight months of worsening pain if he had waited for a hip replacement on the NHS.

Had he chosen to go private, Mr Peters, 60, a chauffeur from Weybridge in Surrey, would still have faced a month-long wait, as well as a £10,500 bill.

But within two weeks of contacting a health tourism agency, he was in a hospital bed being prepared for surgery at the Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, Delhi, for a fraction of the cost.

Mr Peters said: "I was in a lot of discomfort and pain and I really didn't want to wait that long for the operation. It was astonishing how quickly things moved when I decided to go overseas, compared with how long I would have had to wait in Britain. I arrived in Delhi on the Saturday

and within three hours I had all the tests and results and two days later I had the operation."

Mr Peters contrasted the standard of care he received in India with the cursory examination he got from his NHS consultant. "The staff in Delhi could not do enough for me, from the doctors to the nurses and cleaners. They are dripping with staff, because wages are cheap I guess, and that's reflected in the level of service. And I had no fears about MRSA – which is always at the back of your mind when you set foot inside a British hospital. The Apollo is cleaned twice a day and they just don't seem to have MRSA out there because of that."

Mr Peters paid £3,500 for his return flight to Delhi, medical care, nine nights at the hospital and five days recuperating at a five-star hotel. The package was arranged by the Taj Medical Group. He said: "I feel absolutely fine now and have no problems walking, apart from having to lose a bit of weight. I'm very pleased I did it."



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 "After contacting The Taj Medical Group, all the arrangements - my hospital appointment, visas and flights were all in place within 2 weeks - a remarkable service. There is no downside at all. All the staff here are very highly trained and experienced. First impressions – terrific, I can't fault anybody, there are so many people falling over themselves to make my stay comfortable". Barry Peters 59, - Total Hip Replacement, August 05 Today (October 2007) – Living my life to the full, again!

Internationally featured – The Daily Mail, The Daily Telegraph, ITV, BBC, Channel 4, Channel Five News, CNN, Sky, ABC (Australia).
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