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I flew to India for my heart op

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By Charlotte Bailey

A MIDLAND grandmother has been forced to fly 4,000 miles to India for a heart by-pass operation - even though her local NHS hospital is just six miles away.

Mavis Childs, 67, took drastic action after waiting more than two years to have the vital surgery on the health service.

The final straw came when the operation was cancelled and she faced another six months of chronic pain.

Mavis, of Wombourne, near Wolverhampton, says she made the 8,000-mile round trip to the Apollo Hospital, New Delhi because her local hospital let her down.

The private medical bill came to just under £5,000.

The scandal of a Third World country offering a better service has highlighted the crisis in the NHS, which was once the envy of the world.

Mavis, who has three children and four grandchildren, was first diagnosed with heart problems in May 2003.

She went to New Cross Hospital, Wolverhampton, where it was found that she had a blocked aorta, which restricted blood flow to her legs.

Mavis was in severe pain and could not walk more than 20 yards.

"I had a medical procedure in September 2004 but this wasn't successful, so they decided that invasive surgery was needed," she told the Sunday Mercury.

"They warned me that it would be threemonth wait for a bifemoral bypass and since Christmas fell within that time, it would have to be January 2005.

"I had the heart scan in January and assumed that within weeks I would be having the operation.

"But, instead, I got a letter in March saying my operation wouldn't be for another three to six months.

"I then received a letter at the beginning of August scheduling it for September 1

- but on August 14 I had a further letter cancelling it."

A consultant had decided that her condition was not life-threatening so could not justify taking priority over other patients.

In desperation, Mavis contacted **the Taj Medical Centre in Kenilworth**, Warwickshire, which sends British patients to India for treatment.

"I didn't want to wait any longer," she said. "My husband and I hadn't had a holiday for three years because of my condition and we

just wanted it done - so I gave them a call. "It was quicker and cheaper than having the operation done privately here.

"The quote came through on September 22. I accepted it on 23rd and I flew out to India on the 29th.

"We didn't do a single thing. The centre arranged the visas, flights - everything.

Mavis, who flew to India with her husband Ken, 69, said that they had never considered private treatment as an option in Britain because they knew they could not afford it.

"We paid less than £5,000, minus the cost of the flights, for the treatment," she said. "We have been told that the same care would have cost as much as £25,000 in the UK.

"I can walk anywhere now. The Apollo staff

were excellent. I had eight doctors attending to me and the hospital itself was immaculate. "I was in my own private room for two weeks and then had a week in a hotel so that I was nearby for when my stitches had to be taken out."

Mavis, a retired wages clerk, thinks that it is wrong for people to have to go so far for treatment.

"From my experience I think the NHS is good in emergencies," she said. "But if you have to go on a waiting list, you can wait forever and a day."

Dipa Jethwa, Business Development Manager at the Taj Medical Centre said that within the last couple of months they had seen a 50 per cent increase in the number of patients wanting to go to India for treatment. "This time last year we were sending out one or two a month," he said. "Now, around five to 10 patients are going every week."

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