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North Texans Traveling Overseas For Surgery



Reporting

[Maria Arita](#)

FORT WORTH (CBS 11 News) Open heart surgeries, hip replacements, even brain surgery. Medical issues you do not want to take lightly, right? So, why are a growing number of people putting their health, and their lives, in the care of someone in a third world country?

Broderick Martin of Allen is no stranger to hospitals. The 22-year-old has been suffering from a number of medical issues, and has been in and out of hospitals his whole life. But when these health problems caused his hip and joints to deteriorate, Martin's doctor told him it was time for surgery.

But there was a problem.

"No insurance," said Martin. "We didn't have the \$60,000 for the surgery."

So, Martin and his family began looking for alternatives. "Somebody had seen an article, or seen it on TV, an ad for medical tourism," he explained. "So, I just started looking online."

Martin found Boston-based Healthbase, a travel agency of sorts for medical procedures. The agent found a surgeon in Bangalore, India, helped book the airfare and hotel and even put Martin in contact with his new doctor.

"He gave me the same answers the doctor here did," Martin said, "so I was pretty confident at that aspect that he was going to be alright."

The trip and the surgery were booked within two weeks, and over the Thanksgiving holiday, Martin and a friend flew to India for the surgery.

"So totaled out, it's about \$19,000 I think I spent, total," Martin said. "Which, from everything I've heard, is at least a third of the cost of what just surgery and hospital stay would've cost me here."

"Basically," Martin continued, "going to India was the difference between having it done and not having it done."

Martin said that his experience was amazing. "I was treated great, like a king," Martin said. And when his other hip begins to deteriorate, Martin knows exactly what he will do. "I would definitely go back, for the cost and just the experience, all over again."

Diallo Hall and his family had that same feeling. His father-in-law's heart was failing, but he had no health insurance, and desperately needed a quadruple bypass that would have cost more than \$120,000 here in the United States.

"Knowing that he didn't have the financial resources to have the surgery, I think it was a very frightening time for him," Hall said.

Hall and his family worked with a North Texas company to set up a surgery in Mumbai, India, but they had some trouble. Hall's father-in-law needed extra care before the surgery, and the hospital in India demanded more money up-front, for which Hall was not prepared.

Hall said that he felt stranded. He got the money, but said he had no help from the Texas company. "There were times I couldn't even go into the hospital room and see him because I didn't want him to see the stress on my face," Hall said.

Although his father-in-law's surgery went fine, Hall said that the overall experience was bad. However, he did say that it was still rewarding, because he helped to give his father-in-law a second chance at life.

Dallas malpractice attorney Jim Girards said that medical tourism is a dangerous trend. He also said that the background information on overseas doctors and facilities is often incomplete, and if something were to go wrong, you basically have no rights. "The only recourse a patient's going to have is to file a lawsuit under the legal system that exists where the hospital is," Girards explained. "For the most part, that is not going to provide any meaningful relief."

Devon Herrick works for the Dallas-based National Center for Policy Analysis. He recently studied this trend of medical tourism. "If you can save yourself \$40,000 to \$50,000 in turn for a week abroad, I think a lot of people would see that as a good trade-off, as long as they know the quality is good," he said.

Herrick said the main reason that costs are so different is because the cost of both labor and equipment is so much less in India as opposed to America. He also said that some insurance companies are even looking at the possibility of offering policies that address medical tourism.

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