

Rare surgeries, lower costs draw in medical tourists

By Madhavi Rajadhyaksha/TNN

Mumbai: Forty-six-year-old Robert Carson, an American, was admitted in a Bangkok hospital and scheduled for a hip replacement surgery last week. On the eve of his operation, he packed his bags and came down to Mumbai for an alternative surgery.

"I was watching TV the night before my operation, and chanced upon a programme which flashed a clipping about hip resurfacing," he says. He was unaware about this specialised operation, which is considered the latest alternative to the traditional hip replacement surgery. After research on the Internet and a quick weighing of pros and cons, his mind was made up. "I spoke to the doctor and within 48 hours arranged for a medical visa to come down to Mumbai," he recalls as he gets ready for discharge on Wednesday.

Advocates of medical tourism hold Carson as a sign of Mumbai's expanding medical tourism. The city hospital Carson is admitted to currently has three other foreigners, all down for orthopaedic surgeries. "Nearly 15% of the foreigners coming to the city for treatment are for orthopaedic treatment," says brigadier Joe Kurien, chairman of the Indian Health Care Federation, which is promoting the city's medical tourism programme in association with the Medical Tourism of Council of Maharashtra.

"Backing the fact that rare surgeries such as hip resurfacing are not done in too many places around the world, coming down to India works



American patients (from left) Robert Carson, Bradey Thayer, Gordon Deboo and physician Ameet Pispati at Jaslok Hospital in Mumbai on Wednesday

out much cheaper for these patients." says Dr Ameet Pispati, consultant orthopaedic surgeon at Jaslok hospital, who has performed hip resurfacing on 15 foreigners over the past six months. Patients shell out around Rs 2 lakh for a hip surgery as against US \$10,000 elsewhere. Bradley Thayer (60) from Canada, who's knee ligament injury was treated through a quickfix operation on Saturday says, "I have got my knee problem treated at the same price I would have paid to go to the US to get an MRI and examination."

For Carson, it was not only a price issue, "it was a value issue." Doctors in Bangkok had written off his chances of ever setting foot on a sports field. But with hip resurfacing there are no restrictions on a person's mobility. "Give him three weeks and he can even do karate," says his doc-

tor. The foreigners are also all praise for Indian hospitality. "I was actually treated as a patient, not an insurance policy," says one of the patients. The personal doctor-patient bond is alien to these patients who claim doctors back home are impersonal due to strict malpractice norms. Says advanced arthritis patient, Gordon Deboo (73) from San Francisco "Every one from the nurses to the ward boys and ayahs are so cordial."