

### "The finished job is fantastic"

Farah Diggins, 55 had extensive problems with gum disease and lost a number of teeth. She consulted a top London dentist who recommended implants and cosmetic work that could potentially cost as much as £50,000.

However, while on holiday in Corfu she picked up a UK newspaper and read about someone who had had similar dental treatment from Dr. Vijjalakshmi Acharya in Chennai, India. Farah did not know about 'medical tourism' or that there were agencies that could arrange treatment and travel so she got in touch with Dr Acharya through the journalist who had written the feature.

Farah travelled to India for the first stage of her treatment and had 19 implants over a ten day period. "Implants are of differing quality, which affects the cost. Mine are known as Replace Nobel Biocare and are among the best. The cost was £7500 excluding travel and hotel which was another £2000", she says.

Farah had to wait six months for the implants to set in the bone before undergoing more treatment, but was reluctant to travel so far for the next session. Meanwhile she had her implants inspected in Harley Street. The verdict was that they were excellent but she would probably have had fewer implants, supplemented with crown and bridge work, had it been done elsewhere. This was not a criticism of the work, which was declared to be

"the best implants you can get" but that a European dentist might have done it differently.

"I carried out some research and decided to complete phase two of my treatment in Hungary", says Farah. "The practice, called Quality Plant, was in Szekszarda, 100 kilometres from Budapest. They provided transport to and from the airport and to and from the practice to the hotel. The chief dentist is Dr Zsolt Halasz, but his assistant Dr. Agnes Terenyi takes care of all the English patients."

"The treatment was brilliant and I wish I'd gone to Hungary in the first place; India was too far to travel. I was looked after magnificently and the bill for the crowns and veneers came to just £7500 including a stay in the best hotel in the region."

The second stage of Farah's treatment included 18 abutments, 11 fully ceramic crowns, 12 Metalceramic crowns and zoom teeth bleaching. "For similar treatment in the UK I was quoted between £30,000 and £40,000", says Farah.

She confesses, "I am a pretty vain person, and before the gum disease I had perfect teeth so I was delighted with the results. People thought I'd had a facelift as the bone graft had filled out my jawline."



Farah was more than happy with her treatment

■ The Hungarian website is (www.qualityplant.co.uk).

### What if things go wrong?

You need to be aware of complications that can be caused by travel after surgery and during aftercare. Air travel can give rise to additional risks of infection and failure to heal, as well as increasing the risk of developing pulmonary embolism and blood clots, and recuperation in a hot climate after surgery may be uncomfortable or give rise to infection.

You also need to be aware of precautions against infectious diseases, including AIDS, not just from blood products during surgery but during your recuperation. If you are having treatment outside Europe you must have all the relevant vaccinations and anti-malarial precautions in place.

If things go wrong during surgery, you could be on your own. While overseas clinics offer follow-up care, there is not a lot you can do if you are not satisfied. "The responsibility is on the consumer to ensure they choose the right treatment," says Philip Boyle, of RevaHealth. If something does go wrong getting compensation could be difficult.

If the treatment is booked through a UK-based intermediary, such as a medical-tourism firm, then customers can pursue a claim through the UK courts. However, as Keith Pollard, of Treatment Abroad, explains, this won't be the case if you book your treatment direct: "If you pay them for treatment, you are in their jurisdiction. If you have a problem, you have to go to the local authorities or courts in that country for redress."

Ultimately you may have to return to the UK and throw yourself on the mercy of the NHS. You may find your travel insurance will not reimburse you for emergencies arising out of elective surgery abroad.

#### WHAT YOU CAN SAVE ON DENTISTRY

Typical costs of private UK dentistry and overseas dentistry compared

	UK	Overseas
Root canal treatment	£300	£65
Crown	£369	£189
Temporary crown	£30	Free
Implant	£2100	£660
X-ray	£26	Free
Scale and polish	£90	Free
Conscious sedation and intravenous injection per hour	£450	£160
Bridge	£595	£189

In Scotland initial NHS dental examinations are free. NHS patients then pay for 80 per cent of the cost of any further treatment, up to a maximum of £384. In Northern Ireland NHS patients pay for 80 per cent of the cost of all treatment including the initial examination, up to a maximum of £384.

More information: (www.taleurope.co.uk), tel: 0800 075 4400, (www.treatmentabroad.net), (www.revahealth.com).

exclusions may include:

- cosmetic surgery
- dental treatment
- reconstructive surgery
- overseas treatment and repatriation
- complications from excluded conditions
- experimental treatment.

Some insurers will consider requests to pay for treatment outside the UK, but this will only be for treatment that would have been covered in the UK, and will exclude travel and other non-medical costs. Insurers will not take into account the fact that treatment abroad could be cheaper.