



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF PLASTIC SURGEONS

Medical Tourism for Cosmetic Surgery High Risk Complications, High Costs for Treatment

Patients who travel to other countries for cosmetic surgery are at risk of serious and costly complications after they return home, suggests a study in the July issue of *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, the official medical journal of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS). Treatment for infections and other complications of medical tourism may cost the United States health care system \$1.3 billion per year, according to the report by Oren M. Tepper, MD, and colleagues of Montefiore Medical Center, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York.

High Complication Rates and Costs of Going Abroad for Cosmetic Surgery

In a 36-month review of records at their medical center, the researchers identified 42 patients with complications after medical tourism. Abdominoplasty ("tummy tuck") was the most common procedure, followed by liposuction, buttock augmentation and breast augmentation. Most patients underwent multiple procedures and many had multiple complications. Infections, abscesses, wound disruption, kidney infections and blood clots occurred in nearly 50% of the patients requiring hospitalization and 32% required additional surgery.

The average cost of treating these complications was about \$18,000. In addition, 44% of the patients were not pleased with the results of their procedure and most said they would not go abroad for subsequent procedures. Patients overestimated the U.S. cost of their cosmetic surgery by about \$9,000 compared to the average costs reported by the ASPS.

Dr. Tepper said, "Patients may receive suboptimal care because of different standards in surgeon training and in surgical facility accreditation in the destination countries. Even travel itself may contribute to complication risks."