

The implications of medical tourism for patients and health systems

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Patients who travel abroad for medical treatment risk returning with complications or infections that require costly treatment on the NHS and is one of the issues highlighted in a new handbook exploring medical tourism.

In particular, [cosmetic procedures](#) appear an area of growth for medical travel by UK [patients](#), but can often result in costly intervention when back home, researchers at the University of York have concluded.

It's estimated that botched cosmetic work overseas costs the NHS £8 million a year.

Medical tourism - people traveling abroad with the expressed purpose of accessing medical treatment - is a growing phenomenon associated with globalization.

This growth has been boosted by cheaper air travel and by the Internet, which allows medical providers from one country to market themselves to patients in another.

It is estimated that in 2015 globally five million people will seek [medical treatment](#) abroad.

However, little is known as to which patients choose to travel and why, when others do not.

Researchers from York's department of Social Policy and Social Work and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine brought together a global community of researchers and writers to produce the 'Handbook on Medical Tourism and Patient Mobility'. It is published by Edward Elgar.

One of the handbook's editors, Dr Neil Lunt, said: "We have been aware of a growing international group of scholars who are interested in patients who travel out of country for treatment.

"What we wanted to do in this handbook was really to bring together all the scholars but also to focus on places and writers that are quite often neglected.

"Often the focus is on the US and Europe, but there's important things going on around the world in Africa, Asia, Middle East and South America."

The handbook explores the emergence of [medical tourism](#) and patient mobility and the implications this has for patients and health systems around the world.

It explores topics such as risk, law and ethics; patient experience and treatment outcomes for cosmetic, transplantation, dental, fertility and [weight loss surgery](#).

The editors conclude that despite a number of studies focusing on UK patients, there needs to be further research on the potential impact and costs of medical tourism on the NHS.

Neil Lunt added: "If someone decides to go overseas for cosmetic work, that's an individual thing they do. But if when they come back there's work that needs to be done, that typically gets picked up by the NHS.

"People are travelling abroad without necessarily understanding that if goes wrong they are not covered in the same way in terms of redress if they were treated by the NHS or treated privately in the UK. People are so used to just jumping on planes."

Provided by University of York

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