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OAP BEATS NHS QUEUE FOR HIP OP

By Lisa Davidson

A PENSIONER has used her life savings to pay for a hip operation abroad to avoid NHS waiting lists.

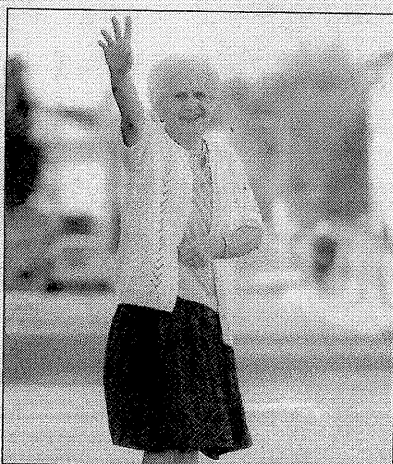
Peggy Francis, 75, has had increasing difficulties walking over the last three years and was told this summer she needed a hip replacement operation.

However, doctors told her in September she would have to wait at least another six months for the operation, but probably longer due to the NHS waiting lists.

Suffering with increasing pain, the Littleport pensioner decided to take drastic action and skip the waiting list by flying to Poland for the operation.

The cost, including flights, the operation itself and four weeks' intensive physiotherapy and aftercare was £6,500 – practically all of her life savings.

Mrs Francis, of City Road, said: "I was first X-rayed three years ago



Up, up and away: Peggy Francis, on her feet again. Picture: Keith Heppell 199783.

and they said it was arthritis. In the last 18 months my hip became more and more painful and I had more and more difficulty walking.

"I had another X-ray in June this year and they said there was severe damage, but there was a 13-week wait just to see a consultant and get on the waiting list. They said it would then be another six months or more after that before they could

operate. It was agony, I couldn't walk and couldn't get out of the house. I just couldn't wait that long.

"A friend told me her sister had gone to Poland and had a successful operation and I thought: 'I wish that was me'."

After carrying out some research, Mrs Francis decided to go-ahead with the operation abroad.

"Everyone thought I was crazy, but my son said I should go for it and think of it as an adventure," she said.

Now back home, with both feet firmly on British soil, she says it was a wonderful experience and she is already walking with just the aid of a stick.

"It was wonderful. It's lovely to be able to walk again," she said. "I'm now walking about outdoors with just a stick. My friends can't believe how quickly I've recovered."

A spokeswoman for Addenbrooke's Hospital said its waiting list for a hip replacement operation is, at worst, nine months, which is in line with Government targets.

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