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Mary flew to Krakow for her pain-busting operation



Poles apart! Why I opted out of NHS

by KATY DOWELL

PHYSICAL agony that afflicted a Totnes woman drove her abroad to find relief for the pain when British hospitals failed to make the grade.

Mary Lidstone suffered from rheumatoid arthritis for several years. Her condition deteriorated considerably over the last year and her NHS consultant told her the only option left was total hip replacement surgery.

Mrs Lidstone said the physical torture of arthritis had been hard to bear.

'You can't describe the pain,' she said. 'It is all you are able to think about - it was unbearable. I just couldn't cope anymore.'

She was not keen on having the operation done in Torbay Hospital.

Mrs Lidstone said she was anxious about the whole experience: the nine-month waiting list, staying in hospital where she would be susceptible to more illnesses and the post-operative care.

Her husband Roy supported her decision to pay the price and go private.

'We saved for a rainy day when we were younger so we were fortunate to have some money put aside,' said Mrs Lidstone.

Researching appropriate hospitals revealed several possible alternatives.

Finally, she found a Polish hospital which could deliver the whole package for a much-

reduced price while she was waiting for a local private hospital to answer her queries.

'It was such a good package that we were worried it could have been a wind-up,' said Mrs Lidstone.

In a private hospital in Britain the basic price tag quoted was £9,000. But this varied depending on the patient's medical condition.

In the Polish public teaching hospital the price - including air fare and 30 days in hospital - was just £6,000.

Mrs Lidstone said two weeks after an initial consultation with her Polish surgeon she was picked up from her home in Totnes and taken to Krakow.

She said: 'We were apprehensive about the trip, but my husband Roy was more concerned than I. He had to stay at home.'

'There were no problems at all. All the little things which we expected to go wrong didn't. I was picked up and taken to a four-star hotel in Croyden. From there I went to the airport where a wheelchair was waiting for me.'

'I didn't have to worry about any of the inconvenient things like luggage or getting from the airport to the hospital. It was all so easy.'

The British firm Barbara

Thurgood and Co medical Services, which organises the operations, sent an escort with Mrs Lidstone to ensure she got the proper treatment.

Top staff at the College of Medicine of Jagiellonian, where the treatment was carried out, could speak English - so Mrs Lidstone said she never felt alone.

'There were no problems whatsoever,' she said. 'It was all so clean I never worried about any suspicious bugs or anything.'

Three weeks of physiotherapy followed the operation and Mrs Lidstone was sent home. She will only have to see her surgeon in Croyden once, for a post-operation check-up.

Already the benefits of going abroad have become clear to Mrs Lidstone. Within a month the pain had gone.

'The first thing that struck me after the operation was that the pain, which had been a part of my life for so long, had gone,' she said.

Five weeks later she says life is wonderful. She said people working for the NHS had treated her with respect and tremendous support, but an 'over-loaded system' failed her.

'I'd like other people who are in my situation to be reassured.'

'There is an alternative to the NHS and British private hospitals - for a better price and much quicker.'

It's a wonderful life: Mary Lidstone, after her operation

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