

Mrs Z.M. Shropshire  
England

## TESTIMONIAL

### **MY KNEE REPLACEMENT IN KRAKOW HOSPITAL (POLAND) APRIL 2003**

I first saw the tiny advert in Saga Magazine, saying that Barbara Thurgood & Co arranges hip & knee replacements in Poland. Both my knees had been bad for some time now. My doctors x-rayed my knees about five years ago but nothing was done about it. I was just told that I had bad arthritis in both knees and so it was left. They started to get quite painful and I asked one of the doctors if I could have something done about them. No was the answer, the waiting list is too long and they are not very good with knees, there could be great risk I was told. Another couple of years went by, I asked again and was told the same thing. Then my husband became ill, he had recurrent cellulitis in his leg and I had to look after him as best I could. His leg used to swell a great deal and there wasn't much they could do about it. He went into hospital, they got his leg better but he came out with pneumonia, and had to go again into intensive care where he died. So my legs became important again and month-by-month they got worse. I went to one of the lady doctors in the practice and asked her if I could have my legs done and she said yes and I told her about Poland, which was much cheaper than England, just 5,950 pounds for one knee. I called Barbara Thurgood & Co and was answered very professionally by Barbara herself who gave me all the details to think about. I was also sent further details about a 28 days joint replacement package including three weeks in the rehabilitation centre with intensive physiotherapy programme. By this time my right knee was getting so painful I could hardly walk. My right knee was also all bent up and I could not straighten it at all, my ankle was beginning to hurt because I was pulling it over and I just could not walk upright.

One day Barbara called me and invited me to meet Professor Franczuk who was visiting at Croydon Park Hotel in Croydon. My son took me to Croydon and it was then when I had spoken to Professor Franczuk and met Barbara & Steve to discuss further details of this package.

I was still waiting to hear from the consultant surgeon from our nearest orthopaedic hospital and it had been at least five months now since the doctor had written her letter, then one day I had a letter to go to see the orthopaedic surgeon in our local hospital. My son took me in the car and then pushed me in the wheelchair. I think they could see the state I was in, the surgeon examined me and tried to push my leg straight and told me that the waiting list

was about twelve months, this meant going through another winter in pain. He mentioned he would put me on the cancellation list. The next day I found I could not walk at all. I went to get up to the toilet and fell back in a chair, consequently getting wet. I tried to get to the kitchen to make myself a hot drink to take some tablets. I only got so far as the hall by scuffling my feet and then holding on to some coats. I fell again, breaking a pot which was holding umbrellas and sticks which scattered all over the floor. I managed to get hold of my mobile phone and phoned the doctor. She came fairly promptly but just gave me a prescription for some more painkillers and some more arthritis tablets. I told her that I will have trouble in getting these tablets. She said " Oh I expect you will get someone to get them for you" and then left. Whether she did not believe I could not walk or whether she just did not take it in I do not know . I phoned round all my friends no one was in , all seemed to be out shopping or somewhere. By this time I was getting in a panic, I did not know what was going to happen to me. I managed to get hold of a phone book and phoned Age Concern. Thank goodness they were sympathetic and sent a gentleman round immediately to help me get my prescription. When he came round and saw the state I was in he sent his wife round in the afternoon who helped me. This kind lady was on the committee and they phoned the social services who then took me into a Nursing/Care Home. The social worker who came to collect me had to wheel me out backwards on the wheelchair to get me into her car. I was there for about ten days to recover and rest before I went to Poland to have my knee done and thank goodness I did.

On the day before I travelled, my son brought me down to Croydon and I stopped at Croydon Park Hotel for 1 night which I did not have to pay for. It was arranged for my convenience by Barbara Thurgood & Co, so I did not need to wake up very early to get to Gatwick airport on time.

On the morning of my departure to Krakow, I was picked up from Croydon Park Hotel and taken by Steve & Barbara to Gatwick airport. At the airport I met another lady who was travelling for knee replacement as well. Her name was Joan. We were both handled very professionally. The moment I left the taxi an electric car arrived and me and other lady were seated on this car together with our luggage. We did not have to queue, we had priority in checking - in and through passport control. While waiting for the departure gate to be confirmed I was treated to cake and coffee which I pleasantly enjoyed with Joan. Once the aircraft was ready to board an electric car picked us up from the waiting hall and took us to the plane. We were the first passengers and a special platform was arranged to lift us into the

plane. None of us would be able to use the stairs to get to the plane.

The plane journey went very quickly(only 2 hrs), I had special seat allocated with extra leg room. On arrival at Krakow airport hospital ambulance was already waiting outside to take us to the hospital. Again the journey was very short - 10 minutes.

It was a Professor Franczuk who did my knee, a man with lots of enthusiasm. I think his colleagues were hesitant about whether he could do it or not, because the knee had been left for too long. I asked him what are my difficulties out of 1-10 and he said about 11.

I spent about two and half hours in the operating theatre. Apparently the ligaments had all calcified on the bone and my leg had already started to fuse. The bone had to be sawed and banded to make my knee joint fit and then he spent a long time sorting out the ligaments. The anaesthetic was very good I had an epidural and I did not know anything until I woke up in post anaesthetic care unit. To my surprise I did not have any sickness which I usually get and Asthma. I did not feel much for the first day or two, but then the pain kicked in and I felt it but they were very good in handling it and I had I.V. line already set up so they just gave me a drip of some sort which dulled the pain. Later on when the I.V. was taken away if we had any pain they would give us an injection or tablets and so I was able to cope. On the second day after surgery I was got up and my leg was put on a special exercise machine which very slowly took it up and then down again, it seemed to take the stiffness out of it. Then every day my physiotherapist came to my room in the morning and in the afternoon to carry on various exercise sessions with me. Gradually I was walking and doing steps comfortably. I would not be able to cope without these exercises.

Throughout my stay in hospital I had been visited every single day by couple of English speaking co-ordinators from Barbara Thurgood & Co, Renata and Milosz, who were making sure that I was happy and satisfied. If I wanted to buy anything outside the hospital they would bring it over the same or next day. They also looked after things like laundry collection and made sure I had enough videos to watch and books to read.

On the day before last I was taken on tour round historic sights of beautiful Krakow. The weather was very nice and I was admiring Krakow from an open electric car accompanied by Renata - my co-ordinator. I was also treated to lunch in an open air restaurant at Market Square.

During my journey back home I was escorted by Steve who made sure that I arrived safely at Gatwick where my son was already waiting for me.

I must say the hospital was very clean. The floors were mopped a few times a day with disinfectant, the toilets and sinks were properly cleaned. The nurses and doctors wore rubber gloves when doing the dressings and always washed their hands when going to another patient. There is a laminar airflow system in the operating theatres, which is ( so I understand) a kind of filter system to drag the bad airflow with bacteria away therefore keeping the operating table sterile and cutting down the risk of infection.

The only thing I had to grumble about was the food. It was not like the English food I am used to . I was told that the menu has been improved now and they are using a new company to provide the English style food.

I have been home just 10 days and I am doing really well, I can walk again, I even started driving again. This is only 6 weeks after surgery has been done. I am so pleased with the outcome and saving of nearly 6000 pounds. It was excellent experience and it was good to take the control of my life and not to be left in limbo wondering how long I have to wait for the National Health Service.

I am truly impressed, my operation was a great success and I was fitted with the best and the most expensive joint which is a Johnson & Johnson prosthesis imported from America. The Professor is pleased with my progress, I think he has saved me from becoming crippled and spending the rest of my life in the wheelchair. In due course I want to go back to Krakow to get my other knee done.

Mrs Z.M from Shropshire