



Medical Tourism

As more U.S. residents are going abroad for medical treatment, an Antigua company guides medical tourists to doctors in Guatemala

Frustrated with the rising costs and maddening bureaucracy of the U.S. medical system, more patients are looking overseas to get treatment of the same or better quality at a fraction of the cost.

This year, well over 1 million North Americans are expected to travel abroad for medical treatment, with the number expected to reach 1.6 million in 2012, according to the Deloitte Center for Health Solutions in Washington, D.C. This compares to the 750,000 U.S. medical travelers in 2007.

Given the growing numbers, along with her own good-natured desire to help people, Lori Shea opened **Guatemala Medical Travel** near La Antigua in 2009 after several

years of informally linking friends and travelers to first-rate doctors in Guatemala.

“I was living at Río Dulce, and a friend would need a root canal, or a tourist was having heart palpitations, and would ask me to help,” recalls Ms. Shea, a New England native with a career in business and tourism consulting. “I was finding doctors with outstanding credentials. It started as the right thing to do for friends.”

Her roster now includes more than 42 doctors, dentists and specialists, mostly in Guatemala City, whom she has checked out thoroughly via personal references from patients and other doctors and through intensive interviews and background checks. “I

do a lot of research. I look at only the top 2 percent, only the A-plus doctors.”

Not only does Guatemala Medical Travel arrange for the care, it also handles transportation, lodging, paperwork and translations. And perhaps most importantly, GMT advocates for the patient.

“You wouldn’t go to court without a lawyer to represent you,” Ms. Shea says. “Why would you go to a hospital without an advocate to help you? It’s your future quality of life at stake.”

After travel expenses, patients typically save 70 percent over what the same procedure would cost in the United States, according to the Deloitte report. Ms. Shea also reports huge savings in Guatemala.


“People ask me why it’s so much less in Guatemala, but the question should be, why is it so much more in the U.S.?” For the answer, Ms. Shea points to a bloated bureaucracy of lawyers, insurance companies and paperwork unique to the U.S. medical system.

And the most sought-after procedures in Guatemala?

“All sorts of dental work. The dental treatments and materials here are world-class quality. It’s not covered by Medicare, Canada’s socialized medicine or most HMO plans,” Ms. Shea answers. “Plastic surgery is also popular—facelifts, liposuction and eye-rejuvenation treatments.”

Ms. Shea reports unanimously positive feedback from her nearly 75 clients so far—“everyone is thrilled!”

Among them is Victoria, a patient from Key West, Florida, who was especially pleased with her eye surgery performed by ophthalmologic specialists in La Antigua.

“The room was filled with loving feelings toward each other as well as to me,” she said. “The attention to the details that are overlooked in the U.S. made for an exquisite experience of being truly cared about as a person and not as a number.” 

Cost comparisons of several medical procedures — Guatemala vs USA <small>Source: www.GuatemalaMedicalTravel.com</small>	TREATMENT	GUATEMALA	USA
	Root canal	\$145	\$750
	Facelift	\$4,800	\$19,500
	Knee replacement	\$11,000	\$42,000
	Breast implants	\$3,300	\$10,000
	Angioplasty	\$11,800	\$57,000

For more information visit www.guatemalamedicaltravel.com or call 5737-3023 in Guatemala or 305-797-0540 in the U.S. Email: lori@guatemalamedicaltravel.com