

Back Surgery in Thailand

Posted by Austin - 2008/04/25 06:00

Not only am I a major contributor to Health & Medical Tourism, but I am also a former medical tourist (of sorts). I live in Thailand, so I didn't have to travel the way most people would. However, my experience with health care in Bangkok was exceptional, and I wanted to take this opportunity to share a little background. Keep in mind that this is not an endorsement or recommendation. Rather, it is an accurate account of my first real experience with the medical tourism industry.

In the Spring of 2006, I began experiencing radiating pain throughout my lower back and legs. Because I was 28 at the time, I assumed that this was just a temporary glitch in my body. A pinched nerve that might go away or an inflamed muscle. Unfortunately, the pain only became worse with time, and my regimen of exercise and yoga actually exacerbated my condition. After two weeks, I finally went in to Bumrungrad Hospital for a diagnosis. I'd heard wonderful things about Bumrungrad, and most of these things turned out to be true. The facilities are plush, the staff members are extremely friendly, the food (in the cafeteria) was delicious, and all the doctors with whom I spoke were fluent in English. After some examinations, it was determined that I probably had a herniated disc. I discussed with my doctors (one orthopedic surgeon and one physical therapist) my options. Because the Xrays and MRIs only showed a minor case, we decided to postpone surgery in favor of physical therapy and pain management.

After several months of this, the situation was not any better. Thus, we decided to abandon conservative treatment options and focus on more drastic measures. For a period of several weeks I went in for epidural injections (steroids) that were designed to shrink the inflammation in the disc and alleviate the pain. Sadly, these methods were not very effective and the herniated disc continued. My doctors informed me that spinal surgery was the last and only option since all of the conservative treatments had failed to yield any conclusive results.

Because I didn't want to undergo extensive surgery, I decided to get a second opinion from a neighboring hospital. My faith in Bumrungrad was as strong as ever, but the thought of having a permanent scar in the middle of my back was not very appealing, so I was ready to explore any and all other options. I stumbled upon the Spinal Centre at BNH Hospital (also in Bangkok) and met with Dr. Wicharn, who I later learned was a world-class spinal surgeon. His analysis was extremely thorough and he was able to describe my symptoms even before I shared with him my medical history and paperwork. Again, we explored some conservative treatments, but after a few weeks, he recommended spinal surgery as the best option. I was quite nervous to say the least, but his bedside manner and confidence were extremely encouraging. I also had an opportunity to meet with the anesthesiologist (Dr. Supranee) who would participate in the surgery. Over the course of several days, these two answered all of my questions, helped me fill out the insurance paperwork, and allayed any fears about the operation. They informed me of reasonable expectations, possible complications, lifestyle changes, and a host of other important pre-op concerns that every patient would have wanted to discuss.

Obviously, I remember very little from the operation itself since I was heavily sedated. However, the 3 days of recovery were about as pleasant as one could expect. The nurses were extremely helpful, and though their English was not 100%, communication was not an issue. Both Dr. Wicharn and Dr. Supranee came to check in on me several times a day, and the nurses brought regular meds, sponge baths (awesome), and refreshments. I also had access to an extensive menu of delicious Thai cuisine which forced me to revise my general opinion of hospital food. I don't want to overhype anything, and besides, food is not the reason one goes to a hospital. But I can honestly say that the breakfasts, lunches, and dinners I had during recovery rivaled anything I had encountered in the rest of Thailand. It truly was that amazing.

The room itself was quite nice. I had a sofa for visitors, a reclining bed, cable, wireless Internet (which I had to pay for out of pocket), a separate mini-bar (no booze), and a full bathroom. When I was finally discharged after 3 days, the total bill (all of which was paid for by insurance) was just over \$5,000 US. This included the food, the drugs, the equipment, the recovery room, and 1 month of vitamins, pain medication, and antibiotics. I honestly don't know what all of this would have cost in my native Washington, DC, but just to shake a doctor's hand can often cost up to \$100.

In short, my experience with medical tourism in Thailand (specifically with Bumrungrad and BNH hospitals) was outstanding. Friendly staff, affordable prices, quality care, and delicious food. I was blown enough away that I decided to share my experiences with the world and help create Health & Medical Tourism so that people like you could learn about this amazing industry. I hope that none of you ever becomes sick. And I hope that if you do become sick, health care in your country is accessible, affordable, and successful. But if you fail to qualify for proper care in your country, it's worth exploring what medical tourism can do for you. No one can promise that your experience will be just like mine (so be careful of companies and sites that offer guarantees). But with enough research and preparation, you can increase the likelihood of having a positive experience. I hope this was helpful for you. Stay healthy and keep smiling.

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Re:Back Surgery in Thailand

Posted by anniephillips - 2009/05/30 03:30

hmmmm nice experience, keep posting buddy

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Re:Back Surgery in Thailand

Posted by waoop - 2010/01/15 17:15

thanks for your information.

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