Understanding the Health & Safety Risks for British Columbian Outbound Medical Tourists

PICnet
April 20th 2012

Janet Bristeir
RN, CCHRA(C)
Introduction & Disclaimer

- My interest in Medical Tourism began when I attended an international conference entitled “Issues and Challenges in Research on the Ethics of Medical Tourism” in 2010.
- From that meeting I became involved in the SFU Medical Tourism Research Group and we applied for funding to facilitate the meeting held on Nov. 2011.
- This was a consultative meeting to learn more about the health & safety issues that could be potentially linked to medical tourism in BC.
- My involvement in this research is as an interested individual.
- I do not represent VCH.
OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION TO MEDICAL TOURISM
What is Medical Tourism?
Medical Tourism for the purposes of this report

- When patients choose to go abroad to privately purchase medical care they are engaging in medical tourism.
- A Medical Tourist is a patient who is paying out of pocket in another country to access medical care.
- Medical tourism is distinct from arranged cross-border care.
- As well as care administered abroad to injured vacationers.
- We did not include:
  - organ transplant;
  - sex reassignment;
  - or fertility treatments involving third parties.
Where are Canadians going?
Medical Tourism for the purposes of this report

Most people taking the medical tourist route are having less sensational everyday surgeries that can require a lot of expensive follow up care:

- hip surgeries
- knee surgeries
- spinal surgeries
- heart surgeries
- plastic surgery and
- some dental surgeries.
AFTER THEIR DIAGNOSIS….. PEOPLE OFTEN SEARCH THE INTERNET

WHAT ELSE IS AVAILABLE?

IS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE?
There are sites that list surgical wait times such as MOH
http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/swt/
In BC Knee replacement surgery could mean a wait of up to a year; depending where you live

---

### Results for: Knee Replacement in all facilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure / Health Authority / Facility / Specialist</th>
<th>Cases Waiting as of 31-Mar-2012</th>
<th>Cases Completed From 01-Jan-2012 To 31-Mar-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cases Waiting as of 31-Mar-2012</td>
<td>Cases Completed From 01-Jan-2012 To 31-Mar-2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbotsford Regional Hospital and Cancer Centre</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>22.6 38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnaby Hospital</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>25.0 36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chilliwack General Hospital</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.7 9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle Ridge Hospital</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39.3 45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langley Memorial Hospital</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>15.1 28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace Arch Hospital</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>15.3 34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridge Meadows Hospital</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7.7 38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Columbian Hospital</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30.1 56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrey Memorial Hospital</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>28.1 39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Kootenay Regional Hospital</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>16.0 33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelowna General Hospital</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>15.6 35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kootenay Boundary Regional Hospital</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>14.7 32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penticton Regional Hospital</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>13.1 22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Inland Hospital</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>35.4 55.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernon Jubilee Hospital</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>31.3 68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawson Creek and District Hospital</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.4 19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitimat General Hospital</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>22.9 43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Rupert Regional Hospital</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
<td>3.7 8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University Hospital of Northern British Columbia</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>38.8 48.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From there it’s a quick click to……
They probably don’t notice…..

“Teen's kidney-for-iPad swap stuns China”

17-year-old told mother he sold organ to afford Apple devices

The Associated Press  Posted: Apr 7, 2012 8:01 AM ET

As they are looking for other surgeries……
What’s information is available in newspapers?

As well as the previous news item about the kidney donor this month there has been:

“International shortcut to surgery; Interest in treatment abroad is taking off as a way to avoid wait lists for procedures”
– By Elaine O'Connor, The Province April 8, 2012

“Researchers want Feds to Track Canuck Patients”
– By Graham Templeton, Vancouver Metro April 10, 2012
OVERVIEW OF CONSULTATION
MEETING NOVEMBER 2011
Aim of meeting

What has been observed by professionals involved in

– Patient Safety
– Health
– Risk Management

as a result of British Columbians involvement in Medical Tourism
Consultation Meeting November 2011

Seven stakeholders attended, representing the health and safety domains of:

- Blood safety
- Tissue banking
- Health records
- Dental care
- Organ transplantation
- Infection control
- Clinical ethics

Five stakeholders represented offices that were Provincial in scope
Meeting Overview

• The meeting ran for four hours.

• Two informational presentations
  – general trends and issues in medical tourism, including common health and safety concerns, and
  – published reports of negative health outcomes from medical tourism.

• A series of open discussion questions were posed by the meeting facilitators and discussed at length.

• Ended with a brainstorming session regarding intervention priorities and other recommendations for addressing the health and safety risks identified.
HEALTH & SAFETY ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS
Potential for Medical Complications

• Lax procedures
• Exposure to infections
• Complications due to pre-existing health conditions
  – Compromised or exacerbated due to lack of medical history
  – Stress of travel
  – Drug interactions
(Un)informed decision making

• Where do patients obtain all the information needed?
• How can an informed decision be made without the information?
• How can they give informed consent for the surgery?
• How reliable are testimonials in marketing materials?
• Who do they ask about the risks involved?
Transmission of Infection via Transplant

• What is the organ donor selection criteria?
• Is there adequate screening for
  – HIV
  – Hepatitis
  – Other infectious diseases
Antibiotic-resistant organisms

- Destination facility may expose patient to antibiotic-resistant organisms

2010

NDMI-1 spread from an Indian hospital to various countries including Canada
Personal Safety at Destination

Political or social instability at the destination may pose a threat to personal safety
(Dis)continuity of Care

- No record of Treatment received
- No Test results
- No Scans or X-rays

This deficiency is a potential threat to continuity of care once the patient is back home
Most patients travel with family or a friend. These individuals can be exposed to unique health and safety risks. As well as the same medical risks the medical tourist can experience.
HEALTH & SAFETY
RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY PARTICIPANTS
What is the difference between health literacy and literacy?

Health literacy is closely related to literacy, but focuses specifically on health information demands.

Health literacy requires the ability to solve problems, evaluate information and know when to take action.
Promoting Health Literacy for patients:

• Whether or not to pursue medical tourism

• What they need to consider when selecting procedures, facilities and destinations; and

• Their responsibilities for seeking necessary follow-up care upon return.
For Health Professionals
Adequate, Appropriate, and Neutral Information

Health & Safety, Potential Risks and Potential Outcomes

• Is the patient suitable to be a Medical Tourist
• Selection of procedure, facility and destination
• Arranging follow-up care on return
CREATING INFORMATIONAL RESOURCES
Informational resources available now:

The following slides are taken from websites, brochures and newsletters published by:

BC Renal Agency & the BC Dental Association

In response to the increasing interest in medical tourism in their specialities
Thinking of buying a kidney?

You may want to think again.

It is illegal in most countries.

Reports on people who purchased kidneys overseas show very high rates of infection and death.

People who sell their kidneys are often coerced and exploited, and receive only a fraction of the dollars spent by the person buying the kidney.
MEDIA RELEASE
October 13, 2011
Dentistry in Mexico May Be Cheap, but Not Always Cheerful
Vancouver, BC – British Columbians planning to winter in Arizona or California may see Mexican dental clinics as a cheaper way to meet their dental care needs. The British Columbia Dental Association (BCDA) provides insights and recommendations to support patients in making informed dental care decisions, and encourages them to weigh the pros and cons before proceeding. Read More...

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PATIENTS
October 13, 2011
British Columbia Dental Association Recommendations for Patients to Consider Before Seeking Dental Treatment Outside of Canada
Clearly understand what dental treatment you need before you leave home. Get a cost estimate from your BC dentist and a clear description of the work that is recommended – and why. Read More...
Dental Tourism
(Dental Care Outside of Canada)

British Columbia Dental Association Recommendations for Patients to Consider Before Seeking Dental Treatment Outside of Canada

View the November 29, 2011 Global News Hour segment on Dental Tourism.

View the November 30, 2011 Global News Hour segment on Dental Tourism.

View the December 1, 2011 Global News Hour segment on Dental Tourism.

View the December 3, 2011 Global National segment on Dental Tourism.

Download PDF version of these recommendations
View BCDA’s media release on dental tourism in the media room.
Resources need to be:

• Patient focused

• Available at a wide range of locations
  – Drug stores
  – Doctors offices
  – Website
  – BC MOH
  – Union Offices
Resources cont.

• Offered in a Variety of languages
• Credible information
• Approval of trusted bodies
  – MOH
  – Centre for Disease Control
  – Public Health Agency Canada
  – Health Professional bodies
Resources cont…

• Guidance not Discouragement
• Awareness-raising resources
• Balance between informed decision making and
• Information on associated risks
Encouraging Communication, Patients

• Speak to their regular doctors prior to going

• Ask destination physicians
  – what is the protocol if something unexpected happens?
Encouraging communication
Health Professionals

• Education for health care providers in BC about Medical Tourism
  – Associated trends and risks

• Outreach to professional may enable more informed conversations with patients asking for guidance on Medical Tourism
Encouraging Travel Medicine

• Intended Medical Tourist should be encouraged to obtain appropriate vaccines for destination countries

• Those travelling for organ transplants should get viral vaccinations
Adapting public health practices

It’s complicated……

– Does the costs of screening patients treated in foreign hospitals outweigh the potential benefits?

– Is the cost of not screening significant to Public Health?
Enabling consultation

Much remains unknown

How involved in Medical Tourism are British Columbians?

– Engage stakeholders and public
– What are the trends
– Specific instances of Health & Safety Risks
Enabling consultation

• Processes need to be developed systematically and rigorously to create a better response to the needs of the health and health system of British Columbians who go abroad as medical tourists
Undertaking research

Where’s your data?

– Health Care administrators and decision makers need data

– Trends need to be identified regarding Medical Tourisms impact on our Health System.

– Professional bodies and health funding organizations need to provide funds to support research to generate the data.
Dec 2011 news item:

Chronic Cerebrospinal Venous Insufficiency - CCSVI

– Registry at UBC MS clinic
REMAINING KNOWLEDGE GAPS & THE IMPORTANCE OF ADDRESSING THEM
Knowledge Gaps

- Medical complications
- (Un)informed decision-making
- Transmission of infectious disease via transplantation
- Transmission of antibiotic-resistant organisms
- Personal safety risks in destinations
- (Dis)continuity of care
- Travel companions
Do you have information to share?

- We'd be keen to hear from those who have observed health and safety risks associated with medical tourism in your own practice.

- You can e-mail us to share your experience.

- We're always looking to expand our networks.
QUESTIONS?
Contact Information

• Website
  – www.sfu.ca/medicaltourism

• Email
  – medtour@sfu.ca

• Janet Bristeir
  – bristeir@gmail.com
References:

• Understanding the Health & Safety Risks for British Columbian Outbound Medical Tourists

• www.bcdental.org

  – Literacy Interventions (2006)

• http://www.bcrenalagency.ca/news/RisksofTransplantTourism/default.htm
  – Renal Agency
THANK YOU