

ASPS statement re Cosmetic Tourism

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The Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) does not support Cosmetic Tourism. As a Society it has safety-based concerns regarding Cosmetic Tourism and the risks associated with the practice, and cautions Australians against considering surgery overseas. ASPS is also concerned that as private hospitals restrict access to theatre for cosmetic surgery this may drive Australians overseas, which potentially could have adverse outcomes.

Cosmetic tourism is a price-driven practice where patients travel overseas to undergo cosmetic surgery procedures; it has experienced a rapid surge in growth in recent years.

Companies tend to advertise on the internet offering all-inclusive 'holiday' packages that include cosmetic surgery procedures. These range from dental implants to more serious invasive procedures such as butt lifts, breast augmentation, liposuction, facelift, tummy tucks, eyelid surgery, and nose reshaping. Unlike all Australian Specialist Plastic Surgeons, (who are subject to AHPRA advertising guidelines), surgeons based overseas have no restriction on the way that they advertise. This means that their adverts may look glamorous or illustrate good results, but in real life this may not always be the case.

Cosmetic surgery is real surgery and like all forms of surgery carries inherent risks. When choosing a surgeon there are many factors to consider which will help ensure the best results and limit risks and complications. While there are many highly qualified and educated surgeons practicing around the globe, Australians who travel overseas for cosmetic surgery are often travelling into the unknown and will be in the care of a health system that is foreign and may not be easy to navigate, particularly if something goes wrong.

At a base level, surgery overseas can appear to be more cost-effective than having the procedure performed in Australia. Cosmetic surgery offers on the internet, to destinations such as Turkey, Thailand and Brazil, often include five-star accommodation, private hospital 'services', "highly qualified" surgeons and heavily "credentialed" "medical staff.

The public should be aware that surgical qualifications, accreditation of medical facilities and standards of devices and products used in cosmetic surgeries overseas may not consistently meet the high standards required in Australia.

ASPS strongly recommends patients take into consideration the risk of potential complications, unsatisfactory results, and risks to general health that may occur if they travel overseas for cosmetic surgery.

What would you do if you developed an infection or bleeding problem after surgery and had to stay in the facility for a longer period? If you became very unwell, you may even require transfer to another, more intensive hospital in that country at your own cost. How would you manage that scenario? How would you travel home under these circumstances? Would you have someone you trust to support you? Do you have a readily available financial buffer if you need to stay longer? Would you feel safe?

These are all questions that need careful consideration before embarking on an overseas journey for cosmetic surgery.

All surgical procedures carry a degree of risk and it is imperative that after any form of surgery a post-operative plan is in place, including appropriate ongoing follow-up. In the event of post-operative complications, follow-up care is essential and a patient should have easy access to the surgeon who performed the procedure and the accredited facility in which the procedure was performed. This is usually impossible once a patient has returned to Australia. Ongoing care would then require the expertise of a new surgical team, and would come at additional cost.

ASPS does not recommend combining surgery with having a holiday. Immediate post-surgery care often includes rest and access to medical assistance, and international plane travel and residing in resort-style accommodation does not provide this.

To help ensure optimal results and to limit risks and complications, the Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons strongly advises against overseas cosmetic surgery tourism.