



Dental Tourism

Hoping to save money on cosmetic and restorative care, some patients are traveling to other countries for dental treatment. Often, they combine the quest for overseas care with a vacation, leading some to label the trend “dental tourism” or “tooth tourism.”

Americans have long demonstrated a willingness to travel abroad for health care, but economic factors are now fueling a rise in dental tourism. Those without insurance are attracted by the prospect of undergoing complex dental procedures at a considerably lower cost than in the U.S. Even patients with coverage may be driven abroad by exclusions and limitations in their dental plans that, for certain procedures, mean they end up paying a substantial share of the cost of care.

One survey of patients opting for care outside their home country showed that most travelers obtained dental implants, with veneers, crowns, and teeth whitening the next most popular procedures. Hungary, Mexico and Poland were the top destinations for dental tourists.

The California Dental Association understands the cost-saving appeal of seeking care outside of the U.S., but advises patients to become fully informed of potential health and safety concerns before opting to travel. What are the standards for training, licensing and care in the destination country? Dentists in the United States must follow stringent infection control and safety standards, including the use of gloves and face masks, the sterilization of instruments and the decontamination of surfaces. Patients considering travel to another country for care should inquire about such precautions, and determine which regulatory agencies oversee dentistry.

In addition, consumers should know their legal rights in the event of complications after treatment. Is there a complaint process or ability to obtain a refund if the care rendered is unsatisfactory? Will their dental plan cover follow-up treatments should they be necessary to repair a problem? Will a patient have the ability to pursue civil action against the dentist for negligence? Does the dentist have malpractice insurance?

CDA suggests that consumers considering this option proceed with caution and with a full understanding of the potential health, safety and legal risks.