

Mal Turismo

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COLUMN ARTICLE

The pictures on the right are of a lady that went abroad in order to avoid the 'high' cost of dental care in Canada. Unfortunately, she saved nothing and is worse off for her efforts. We all have cases we are not proud of but almost every possible iatrogenic endodontic mishap was encountered in this case. The treatment was substandard and the patient was not informed of the poor prognosis afterwards.

Dental tourism includes new citizens travelling back to their country of origin. These people may have a false sense of security as they speak the lingua franca and have relatives living in the area. However, the woman above returned to her 'old country' for what she thought was a deal. Familiarity with a local language and culture does not equate knowledge of the regional standard of care.

I am impressed the high skill level of general dentists in Western North America. The dental market in Western Canada is competitive and the populace has a relatively high dental IQ. Our patients are informed consumers with easy access to care. One needs to be a skilled practitioner to do well here. This is the 'carrot' that helps maintain our high standards.

Other jurisdictions may not have analogous licensing and accreditation protocols for dental education, dentists, dental staff, inspection of dental offices, radiation use, dental

materials, sterilisation, ethics, continuing education, privacy, etc. Canadian dentists are well trained professionals with numerous responsibilities. We are held accountable for any misstep, be it patients leaving the practice, bad social media reviews, involvement of the dental association or college, and ultimately the courts. The BC College of Dental Surgeons will impose sanctions on any BC dentist who provides inadequate care and need not have a complaint in order to act. Public safety is the primary concern of our regulatory bodies. Insurance companies closely monitor our billing practices and impose strict penalties for infractions. These are the 'sticks' that ensure we are ethical and provide a high standard of care for every patient. Dental tourists cannot assume they will enjoy the same protection or high standards as our regulatory bodies and courts are powerless to address foreign mal treatment.

A recent study by the Province of Albertan cited the significant and growing costs of rectifying complications from medical tourism. Many of the medical tourists are worse off for their adventures with life altering complications and permanent disabilities. Consideration is being given to holding medical tourists liable for all costs related to complications associated with their foreign treatment. It is not unreasonable for western insurance companies to consider refusing coverage for procedures necessary to address complications dental tourists encounter. Regardless of the jurisdiction, it is always cheaper to have a procedure done well once.

Dental tourism and the allure of supposed 'cheaper' treatment is not a risk-free panacea. There is little we can do to stop deal seekers taking risks abroad and we cannot partake in the international race to the bottom. Fortunately, dental tourism is not all one way. A growing number of foreign nationals are coming to Canada because of our high standard of care; they recognise the value of the investment in their health. Our best defence is to maintain our high standards.

In summary, it does not matter how much this lady thought she saved in going abroad for her treatment, she paid too much for what she got.



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