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Australia's dentists issue warning about 'dental tourism': Don't gamble with your wallet or your dental health

Australia's dentists are issuing a warning about the risks involved with medical or dental tourism – the practice of undertaking medical or dental treatment procedures overseas while people are on holidays. Complex dental procedures that require ongoing follow up work and time to settle, not to mention the risk of complications that need corrective action, means that undertaking 'dental tourism' on the back of a 'cheap holiday' risks costing more than the purported savings – as well as possible additional pain.

Australian Dental Association (ADA) Deputy Chairman of the Oral Health Committee Dr Michael Foley said, "The decision to become a dental tourist usually comes down to one simple thing – saving money. And while it's true you may save some money in the short term, the reality is that things can go wrong and all those expected savings can quickly disappear and end up costing more than the holiday itself".

The factors that any prospective traveler considering undertaking medical or dental treatment overseas must consider are:

- Too many procedures, too little time
Many dental treatments, such as root canal surgery, need to be conducted over a number of visits at least a week apart to give the teeth and gums sufficient time to recover between procedures. Trying to squeeze several complex procedures into a short holiday means people risk all kinds of complications, even if the work is performed to an acceptable standard.
- Things can go wrong
Overseas treatments that require corrective work creates more problems that would have been minimised if the original work done in Australia. Returning overseas to attend the original practitioner means that any savings gained from that first 'cheap flight' ticket are likely to be lost. Also, there may be additional costs with seeking an Australian qualified dentist to attend to the dental issue 'mid-stream' which is not recommended.
- Standards may not be as stringent
While Australian dentists are trained to a very high standard, must be registered, and are required to operate in a strictly-regulated environment, not all countries have the same requirements. The overseas dentist may not be as qualified as their Australian peers and may not be working with the same quality of materials as those routinely used here.
- Infection and antibiotic resistance
A matter of increasing concern for health professionals is the growth of "Superbugs" which are resistant to the antibiotics commonly used to treat serious infections. Previously rare in Australia, superbugs are appearing more and more as people return from treatment in overseas hospitals and clinics that do not adhere to Australia's infection control standards. Australian dentists, by contrast, are obligated to adhere to strict infection control protocols.

Dr Foley concluded, "Complex procedures – medical or dental – should not be done over the course of a holiday. If you have the need for a complex medical treatment or procedure, it is best done in Australia where you can be assured of the safety and quality standards in place, and of the certainty of follow up.

"Don't risk the 'cheap health holiday away' only to have a 'big health bill' after you come back".

Interviews available with: Deputy Chair of the Australian Dental Association's Oral Health Committee, Dr Michael Foley.

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