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MEDIA RELEASE

Guideline offers key considerations for medical tourists

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Canadians considering going abroad for surgery or other medical care may want to take note of some advice from a team of Simon Fraser University experts studying the practice of medical tourism.

SFU's [Medical Tourism Research Group](#) has created an information sheet for patients considering traveling to other countries for health care.

The researchers earlier found that while Canadians opt for this practice for a variety of reasons, there is a range of ethical concerns related to health and safety risks that are not typically top-of-mind, and few resources to find answers.

Created by SFU ethicist Jeremy Snyder, the one-page information sheet outlines for prospective medical tourists several key points to consider, from unforeseen costs and procedure risks to contracting diseases and patient rights.

It also points to the potentially negative impacts medical tourism could have on local communities. "Medical tourism might direct resources away from low-income settings or redirect health personnel," says Snyder. As well, tourists undergoing procedures abroad such as hip replacements may return home requiring expensive on-going treatment "that burdens people in Canada waiting in queue," he says. "We want to educate people about these concerns."

Snyder and colleagues undertook a study published earlier this year looking at the legal implications of the risks of medical tourism for patients, which pointed to concerns over "unintended and undesired" effects on patients' home healthcare systems. In 2011 a focus group found concerns ranged from surgery and treatment complications to uninformed decision-making.

Snyder suggests those considering medical tourism should weigh the pros and cons and become better informed on the potential consequences of the option for themselves and other before making a decision. He's hoping to distribute the guideline widely across Canada.

A Canadian Institutes of Health Research grant supported the work. More information, including a range of medical tourism research involving several popular travel destination countries, can be found at www.sfu.ca/medicaltourism/resources.html

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