SUMMARY

- Dentistry is the most popular medical treatment category for UK patients seeking care abroad\(^1\)
- Eastern European countries, such as Poland and Hungary, are the most popular destinations for UK patients. Thailand is the most popular long-haul destination\(^2\)
- MEDIGO.com predict 200,000 UK patients will go abroad for a medical treatment in 2015\(^1,2\)

WHAT IS MEDICAL TRAVEL?

Medical travel, also known as health or medical tourism, describes the practice of individual patients leaving their country of permanent residency to seek medical care abroad.

The medical treatment may be the primary motivation for travel or may be incidental to a planned trip. Destinations such as Thailand, Malaysia, Mexico, Turkey, Spain, Poland, and Hungary have established themselves as providers of high quality medical care by developing their international patient help desks and international hospital accreditations, such as the Joint Commission International (JCI), Temos, and various accreditations recognized by the International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua).

WHO ARE MEDIGO?

MEDIGO is a platform dedicated to medical travelers, founded in the belief that patients should have as much information as possible when choosing a health care provider or deciding to undergo treatment. MEDIGO.com allows patients to search, compare and co-ordinate surgery from within 40 medical specialities at clinics and hospitals in more than 18 countries.

The platform lists price estimates of procedures in various hospitals, displays detailed physician and clinic profiles, and aggregates patient reviews of hospitals and doctors. MEDIGO perform quality checks to see if clinics have international accreditations, if their physicians are affiliated with medical boards, make enquiries with past patients and gather annual statistics on procedures performed along with success rates.
MEDIGO’s international Care Team facilitates the process of scheduling medical treatment abroad. The experienced team assists with personalized treatment plans and custom quotes, medical record translation, arranging accommodation and ground transportation.

**UK PATIENT MOTIVATIONS FOR MEDICAL TRAVEL**

Patients from the United Kingdom seek medical care abroad for three major reasons: waiting times, cost, and access to specialist care.

**Access to Care and Waiting Times**

Patients may be confronted with personal or institutional barriers to care which result in negative health outcomes. With respect to dental care, an estimated 44% of the UK population did not see a dentist within the past two years.

In terms of waiting times, the NHS Constitution gives patients the right to access services within a maximum time-frame. Despite these legislative efforts, the number of patients waiting for treatment is significant. National statistics released by the NHS show that in the last year, the waiting times for Referral to Treatment (RTT) for admitted patients was about 9 weeks and the RTT waiting list was on average around 330,000 higher than the same months in 2013.

In the last year, nine specialties were below the NHS admitted waiting time standard:

- General Surgery, Urology, Trauma and Orthopedics, ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat), Ophthalmology, Oral Surgery, Neurosurgery, Plastic Surgery, and Cardiothoracic Surgery.
- The largest absolute numbers of patients waiting to start treatment were found in Trauma & Orthopaedics, Ophthalmology, ENT, and Gynaecology.
Cost of Treatment

Many medical procedures are covered by the NHS, but are contingent upon diagnosis and treatment type. Dental implants, for instance, are only covered by the NHS when there is a demonstrated a medical need. This includes patients who are unable to wear dentures or who have had jaw damage. Additionally, superior treatment options, such as certain brands of dental implants, must be paid for out of pocket by the patient.

Depending on the individual treatment plan, UK patients can save between 50% and 80% on treatment when they travel to a clinic or hospital located abroad. A representative sample of the difference in quoted prices at private clinics in the United Kingdom and at hospitals in other parts of the EU.

Figure 1. The average cost of treatment in the United Kingdom and at MEDIGO partner clinics or hospitals within the EU.

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF UK MEDICAL TRAVELERS

In March 2015, MEDIGO commissioned a survey which asked 1,000 UK residents aged 24 and older “Did you travel to a foreign country for medical care in 2014?” (Table 1). While a majority of those surveyed had not traveled abroad for medical care, nearly 1 in 10 reported that they know someone who had medical treatment
abroad in 2014. The survey results are an indication of the growing acceptance of medical travel in the United Kingdom.

The younger the user, the more likely they were to have traveled abroad themselves for medical care or to know someone who did. For those aged 25-24, these two responses accounted for 22% of all responses. Those between 55 and 64 were least likely to have traveled abroad themselves or to know someone else who had (fewer than 10%). Gender, Geography, Urbanicity, and Income Level did not have any significant effect on the answers.

Based on the volume of inquiries for UK patients seeking treatment abroad, MEDIGO estimate that in 2015 the total number of UK Patients going abroad will be 200,000. This estimate is significantly larger than the 63,000 detailed in the most recent International Passenger Survey (IPS) conducted most recently in 2010.

Why is the IPS figure comparatively conservative? The IPS randomly surveys a representative sample of passengers entering and exiting the UK. The survey asks whether a medical treatment is the primary purpose of travel and thus reflects only a portion of UK residents who had medical treatment abroad.

● The survey does not take into account patients who view their trip as primarily for leisure, with a medical procedure forming a secondary element of the trip.
● The survey also does not take into account patients who decide to have a medical treatment while on holiday or during an extended period of travelling.
● The survey does not take into account patients who require a medical treatment as the result of an accident or incident while on holiday or travelling abroad.

**POPULAR PROCEDURES FOR UK MEDICAL TRAVELERS**

MEDIGO currently lists more than 350 clinics and hospitals in 18 countries, which specialize in dentistry, ophthalmology, and plastic surgery, as well as complex care in neurology, cardiology, oncology, orthopaedics, reproductive medicine, and urology. Medical travellers from the United Kingdom primarily seek treatment abroad for expensive procedures in dentistry and plastic surgery. Table 1 lists the most frequently inquired for procedures among MEDIGO inquirers residing in the UK in 2014.
Table 1. Most popular specialties and procedures for MEDIGO inquirers from the UK in 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dentistry</td>
<td>70% of MEDIGO inquiries from the UK were within dentistry. Popular procedures were Dental Implants, Veneers, and Crowns.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plastic and Cosmetic Surgery</td>
<td>16% of MEDIGO inquiries from the UK were for plastic and cosmetic surgery procedures. Popular treatments were Liposuction, Breast Implants, Rhinoplasty, and Eyelid Surgery.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ophthalmology</td>
<td>5% of MEDIGO inquiries from the UK were for ophthalmology procedures including Cataract Surgery, LASIK Laser Eye Surgery, and Glaucoma Treatment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hair Restoration</td>
<td>3% of MEDIGO inquiries from the UK were for hair restoration procedures including Hair Transplant, Eyebrow Hair Transplants, and Hair Loss Treatment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reproductive Medicine</td>
<td>2% of MEDIGO inquiries from the UK were reproductive medicine treatment such as In Vitro Fertilization (IVF).</td>
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POPULAR DESTINATIONS FOR UK MEDICAL TRAVELERS

The most popular destinations for patient inquiries were for clinics and hospitals in Poland, Hungary, Thailand, Turkey, and Spain.

Table 2 indicates the proportion of inquirers by destination along with the cheapest roundtrip flight for the time period January 30, 2015 to February 2, 2015 as identified on January 14, 2015 by www.google.co.uk/flights.

Table 2. Most popular destinations for MEDIGO inquirers from the UK in 2014, estimated travel duration, and estimated roundtrip airfare cost

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination Country</th>
<th>Distribution of MEDIGO inquirers</th>
<th>Air Travel Time from London</th>
<th>Air Travel Costs from London</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>2.5 hours</td>
<td>£63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>2.3 hours</td>
<td>£88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>11.5 hours</td>
<td>£626</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3.8 hours</td>
<td>£152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2.5 hours</td>
<td>£77</td>
</tr>
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REFERENCES


MEDIGO’s aim is to deliver affordable and high quality medical care anywhere in the world. Patients schedule treatment with internationally accredited clinics and hospitals over a free-to-use, user-friendly platform.

To learn more, send an email to contact@medigo.com.