



TOOTHFULLY SPEAKING!

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Dental Vacations” Too good to be TRUE?

What a fantastic summer mother nature has blessed us Kamloopsians with! Labour day and school approaches. And so starts the process of kicking our kids off the couch and assembling numerous items for school. It's not hard to notice most school supplies are manufactured overseas for a fraction of Canadian costs. We buy many goods from overseas, including luxury items, cars and clothing which are made in developing countries. How about getting our dental work done there?

As a dental professional for over 20 years, I have travelled, worked and lectured in many countries and can't help but make the analogy of my profession to the manufacturing industry. Dental staff employed at overseas clinics are severely underpaid compared to any Canadian employee. Dental equipment may look the same but it is not the quality used in my office which is manufactured in the USA or Germany. Instruments readily fracture and rust and bridges and crowns are NOT manufactured with the same precious metals and ceramics that Canadian dental labs are mandated to. Overseas dental labs talk about melting down cutlery to act as base metals in crown and bridge work! Needless to say the rent and office overhead in the average Canadian dental office can run anywhere from 50-80% while it is only 5-12% in overseas clinics due to low rent, labour costs and cheap products and equipment.

It is very appealing for me as a patient to go lie on a beach while my bridge is being manufactured or my implants are integrating to make a pleasurable experience out of dentistry which traditionally has been less than "pleasant". Countless companies have sprung up specializing in dental tourism which include flight, accommodation, transportation and even sightseeing packages. The only thing they don't offer are guarantees; most insist on their clients signing waivers freeing them of liability and protecting them from responsibility for their dental work. Keep in mind the more complex the treatment the "promised savings" translates to the more can go wrong. Ilene Little, founder of Travel4Health who wrote "How To Plan A Successful Medical tourism Trip" states that she has received "more complaints from patients about implant procedures than any other treatment". Let's not even mention the obvious on hygiene, infection control and consumer protection, including Canadian mandatory malpractice insurance. Infections are a significant risk, with Hepatitis A, B, C, typhoid fever and tuberculosis being epidemic in most tropical countries - let alone the recourse on a botched treatment?!

Research shows that dental problems and failures start happening immediately but even up to 3 years later - when your dental vacation is a distant memory! Routine maintenance and care of dental work is key to their success, this is often not possible when treatment is done out of the country leaving the patient with expensive adjustment and repair costs when they return - who is going to take responsibility?

My colleague and specialist Dr Duncan Chambers from Kelowna: "A recent patient mortgaged her house to get treatment done in Mexico only to have it all fall apart as soon as she returned. All eight of her dental implants had failed. With a second mortgage to pay she had no funds left to get her teeth fixed and is now walking around without any teeth at all. It is common that many additional procedures are done in order to increase the profitability. Patients have told me that they only wanted a couple of teeth fixed but left with more than 20 teeth treated; teeth that did not need treatment!"

With the summer drawing to a close and thoughts of a Christmas or Spring Break getaway loom I hope your vacations and your dental health are both positive experiences, even if you choose to do both at the same time! Enjoy the last few days of a messy house before the kids go back!

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