

# primer

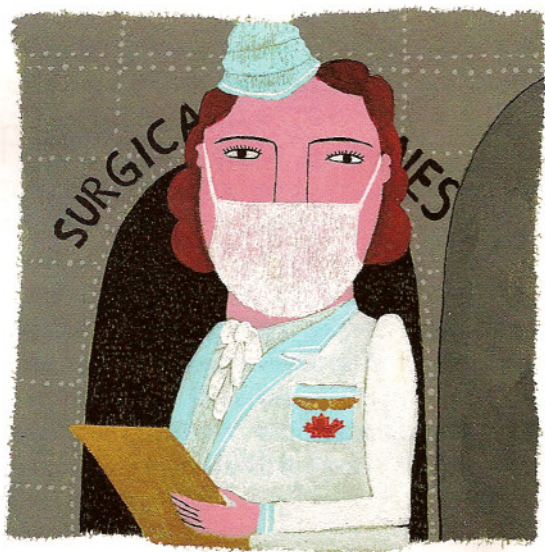
## HEALTH CARE

# Sun, sea and surgery

**G**ina Littley is \$16,000 poorer and has never felt better. Last July, the 69-year-old Penticton resident made a 19-hour journey to Chennai, India, for private spinal surgery that doctors in B.C. refused to perform for fear of worsening her condition.

Littley and her husband spent four weeks in India. She was in hospital for one week, and the couple spent another week in a four-star hotel and two at a four-star beach resort. "We could have spent just one week there, but it was so nice," she confesses.

Littley's entire trip – travel, accommodation and surgery – was arranged by Surgical Tourism Canada Inc. (STC), a Vancouver-based company founded in July 2005 by president and CEO Yasmeen Sayeed. Sayeed, a health-care-management veteran, has worked in India, the U.K., the United Arab Emirates and Canada, most recently as a regional manager with the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority.



Noticing that day procedures were being outsourced to private health facilities, Sayeed thought major surgeries could also be outsourced. The health authorities balked, but Sayeed went ahead and created her company anyway. "I thought it would take about six months before we would fly our first patient to India," she confides. "But within 15 days we already had a confirmed case for a hip resurfacing."

Sayeed's husband, Saleem, STC's VP of business development, says the group took in about \$500,000 in its first year.

STC's connections to Asia's largest health-care group, the 38-facility Apollo Hospitals Group, recently caught the attention of Flight Centre North America. In January, the travel agency entered into a partnership with STC to be its preferred travel provider.

"People want to bypass the waiting lists in Canada, and in the U.S. they want to mitigate the costs," notes John Beauvais, Flight Centre's head of supplier relations. "That says to me that there is a big market, potentially, out there." □