

The world of healthcare

By Michael McQuillan News Leader
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The owner of Surgical Tourism Canada thinks the service her company offers is just the right medicine for an ailing healthcare system.

As the company name implies, Burnaby's Yasmeen Sayeed is in the business of sending people to countries like India and the United States for medical procedures, like knee surgeries and hip replacements. With lengthy surgical waiting lists in many provinces and the high cost of the medical system in Canada, Sayeed says her company acts much like a relief valve for public healthcare.

"I'm not for private healthcare. We're in a publicly-funded healthcare system and everyone has a right to timely healthcare," she said. "But it's impossible to provide timely healthcare in a system like this. If you throw billions of dollars you're not going to solve it.

"So you need to be creative and this is an option that will save the public healthcare system money."

Medical tourism has been around for thousands of years, she said, referring to people making pilgrimages to ancient Greek and Roman spiritual and healing shrines. Today many countries in Europe send patients to hospitals in India because of long waiting lists and the high cost of treating them at home.

India is the most popular destination for medical tourism with an estimated six medical corporations geared to the growing business. Sayeed's company uses Apollo Hospital Services and she said she's visited that company's hospitals and doctors.

"The cost is about a third of what it would be in Canada.

"Here they're throwing patients out of the hospital three days after surgery and there's no home support. So people are actually struggling to take care of themselves and ending back in emergency."

People interested in going abroad for medical care need to do their research, she said. Some companies involved in the growing industry have experience in tourism but no background in healthcare. Those firms typically do a poor job of researching the hospitals and doctors they are sending patients to. Sayeed started her company after working with the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority.

"You need to understand healthcare. You need to know the ropes," she said.

For information on Surgical Tourism Canada, go online to www.surgicaltourism.ca.

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Yasmeen Sayeed's company, Surgical Tourism Canada Inc., helps arrange medical tours to countries like India, where people can access health care they might not otherwise be able to get in a timely fashion in the Canadian medical system.