

# Surge in cosmetic surgery tourism worries NZ doctors

Rebecca Todd

New Zealanders flying overseas for a quick nip and tuck are returning with more than they bargained for, plastic surgeons warn.

Christchurch cosmetic surgeon Dr Howard Klein said there was a growing trend of people going overseas for plastic surgery and returning with complications.

"In the past year it has noticeably picked up, and I think that's a direct result of these companies marketing directly to the public," he said.

Companies such as Gorgeous Getaways offer accommodation and plastic surgery packages at up to half the price of an operation in New Zealand.

Its website says New Zealanders can pay just \$6210 for a breast augmentation in Malaysia or Sri Lanka, along with 10 nights

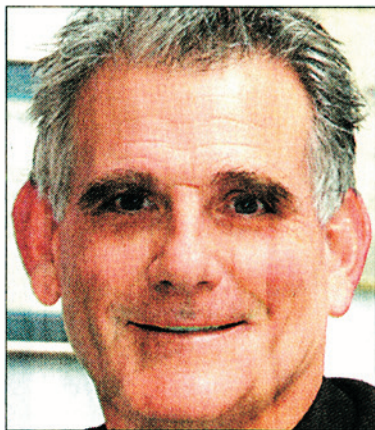
accommodation. The same procedure would cost between \$9000 and \$16,000 at home.

Klein said he saw six patients last year with major complications after an overseas operation. One required hospital treatment and had to have her infected implants removed. She would be permanently disfigured because she could not afford to have the problem fixed, he said.

"What I have seen is a mixture of embarrassment and regret and some anger, because there're issues of 'who pays for it now?'" he said.

"There are good plastic surgeons in Kuala Lumpur, no question about it, but one of the problems is that it's hard to know what somebody's credentials are."

New Zealand Foundation for Cosmetic Plastic Surgery president Tristan de Chalain said the problem with surgical holidays was that they



Howard Klein

provided no post-operative care.

Surgical complications could include bad scarring, tissue damage and severe infections.

Most New Zealand patients

seemed to go to Indonesia and Thailand, but the industry was also booming in South Africa, where people could have a safari included in their trip.

"It's a bit of a worldwide phenomenon, but people are not thinking it through," he said.

"If they want major work done, their first and only consideration is cost."

De Chalain was critical of the idea of combining a relaxing beach holiday with major surgery.

"If you have six to eight hours of surgery, the last thing you feel like doing is lying on a beach.

"You want to lie in bed in a dark room," he said.

Air travel increased the risk of deep vein thrombosis, and a lot of the surgery would also increase that risk.

New Zealand Association of

Plastic Surgeons president Colin Calcinai said some of the results he had seen were "appalling".

"Time and again I hear stories where people have turned up, seen the surgeon for the first time on the day of surgery, had the operation, been discharged and back home.

"Then the problems start," he said.

Patients who experienced complications had usually spent all their money so looked for help in public hospitals or through the Accident Compensation Corporation, he said.

Accident Compensation Corporation spokesman Laurie Edwards said the agency dealt with three or fewer claims a year of people suffering complications after having plastic surgery overseas.

He said people were only covered if the operation had been performed by a registered health professional.