# Experts warn about the risks of seeking weight-loss surgery abroad



Experts are raising alarms over the rising trend of individuals seeking weight-loss procedures abroad, particularly due to enticing special offers and discounted rates that may compromise the quality of care. This warning comes as more patients with obesity turn to international medical practices in search of timely treatments, a necessity driven by extensive waiting lists within the UK's healthcare system.

As reported by The Irish News, there are likely thousands of cases annually in the UK of patients opting for bariatric surgery overseas, though the exact number remains unclear. Concerns have been highlighted regarding the substandard care some patients have encountered, leading to serious complications, and in some instances, death. The situation has prompted academics to develop a set of safe practice guidelines specifically aimed at bariatric and metabolic surgery tourism.

The consensus paper emerges from a collaboration involving the European Association for the Study of Obesity, the International Federation for Surgery of Obesity and Metabolic Disorders European Chapter, and the European Coalition for People Living with Obesity. Key recommendations from these guidelines urge patients to consult their healthcare providers in their home country before considering overseas surgery. Notably, it is advised that only individuals who are classified as obese, with a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or more, should be eligible for bariatric procedures abroad.

Among others, the guidelines stipulate that:

* Surgical tourism should only occur at accredited centres.
* Such centres must offer accredited surgeries or treatments.
* Patients are to be monitored for at least two years after the procedure.
* Comprehensive information about potential risks and benefits—including those related to travelling for surgery—should be provided.
* Patients who travel for surgery should not participate in research studies.

Professor Volkan Yumuk, president of the European Association for the Study of Obesity, emphasised the need for these guidelines, stating, “There have been too many cases of poorly performed, and in some cases unsafe, obesity surgery carried out abroad under what we would call medical tourism.” He expressed that the obesity community has united to ensure that obesity surgery throughout Europe adheres to appropriate standards for safety.

Dr Laurence Dobbie, the paper's lead author from King's College London, contended, “Across Europe, people living with obesity often wait several years, or lack access entirely, to obesity surgery in their home countries, prompting many to seek treatment abroad.” He highlighted the risks involved and the tragic outcomes sometimes associated with inadequate medical care providers.

In addition, a recent report from the Obesity Health Alliance indicated that patients in England may face waits of up to five years for specialised weight management support, with some services overwhelmed and closed to new patients entirely. According to the latest Health Survey for England, 64% of adults were reported as either overweight or obese in 2022.

As medical tourism becomes an increasingly common route for treatment, the focus remains on ensuring patient safety and establishing rigorous standards for overseas surgical procedures.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.bmj.com/content/384/bmj.q583> - This article supports the claim that thousands of UK patients are opting for bariatric surgery overseas due to long NHS waiting times, highlighting concerns about substandard care and complications. It also mentions the need for clearer warnings about the risks associated with overseas weight loss surgery.
* <https://www.healthierweight.co.uk/blog/weight-loss-abroad-lets-talk-about-it/> - This blog post discusses the trend of UK nationals traveling abroad for weight loss surgery, emphasizing the risks and the importance of choosing reputable providers. It mentions that the NHS often handles complications arising from such surgeries.
* <https://www.bmj.com/content/387/bmj.q2774> - This report provides context on the demand for bariatric surgery in the UK, noting a decline in private admissions and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on elective procedures. It indirectly supports the idea that patients might seek alternatives abroad due to domestic constraints.
* <https://www.easo.org/> - The European Association for the Study of Obesity is involved in developing guidelines for safe bariatric and metabolic surgery tourism, emphasizing the need for accredited centers and proper patient monitoring.
* <https://www.ifso.com/> - The International Federation for Surgery of Obesity and Metabolic Disorders supports guidelines for safe surgical tourism, highlighting the importance of accredited surgeries and comprehensive patient information.
* <https://www.obesityhealthalliance.org.uk/> - The Obesity Health Alliance reports on long waiting times for specialized weight management support in England, which can prompt patients to seek treatment abroad, aligning with concerns about medical tourism and patient safety.