



Surgeon takes flight to cut costs

By Carol Gentry
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Some patients travel to other countries to get a price break. But how many take their surgeons with them?

Last month, a Miami-area surgeon and one of his prostate cancer patients flew together to Trinidad so that the uninsured patient could afford the procedure he wanted.

His choice was laparoscopic radical prostatectomy -- a small-incision removal of the prostate rather than open surgery. Surgeon Arnon Krongrad, who specializes in that type of surgery, said they were able to get everything done for less than half of the estimated \$40,000 to \$50,000 the patient had been quoted.

The concept "establishes a brand-new precedent," Krongrad said. "It's a global house call on steroids."

The idea came as a surprise to Linda Quick, president of the South Florida Hospital & Healthcare Association. "I confess I haven't heard of anything like that."

She said there were doubtless some hospitals in South Florida that would have worked out a payment plan for an uninsured cancer patient, but conceded that the price for those without coverage can be much higher than for the insured, who get group rates.

The patient, an uninsured 57-year-old truck driver from another state, was identified only by his first name, Wayne. The surgeon and patient discussed their trip in a recording posted at Krongrad's [web site](#), in a section he set up for a business concept called Mobile Surgery International.

In the recording, Wayne said that he could not work out a payment arrangement with a hospital that he could afford and still get the procedure he wanted, rather than traditional prostatectomy.

Krongrad said he arranged to do the surgery at West Shore Medical Center in Port of Spain because he has been there and knows the administrators. He took only a few small tools he likes and an assistant surgeon; the hospital had everything else they needed.

The surgeon said he's been puzzling over how the health-care system can meet the needs of all Americans for an affordable price while still preserving quality and choice. While he's filed the papers to start Mobile Surgery International and gave it a web site, he doesn't know whether it will lead anywhere.

The Trinidad trip was an experiment, he said. "It's just an example of a doc helping a guy who had his back against the wall."

--Contact Carol Gentry by e-mail or at 727-410-3266.



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