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Mumbaikars throng Pune for cheaper surgeries

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Patients from the city prefer IT hub for surgeries due to the vast difference in costs and availability of state-of-the-art facilities.

It is an irony of sorts. While Mumbai, with its expert doctors and state-of-the-art facilities in hospitals, lures medical tourists from abroad, cost-conscious Mumbaikars prefer travelling to Pune for treatment. The city, 120km from Mumbai, has become the preferred medical tourism destination due to the availability of experienced surgeons, latest diagnostic equipment and the vast difference in costs. Surgeons in Pune said most surgeries in the IT-hub are 20-50% cheaper compared to Mumbai. Rashmi Pednekar, 39, was bed-ridden for four years after being diagnosed with rheumatic arthritis. She underwent a complicated total knee replacement surgery on both knees at a Pune hospital in May. "Inquiries at three city hospitals revealed that the procedure would cost above Rs7 lakh. The expenditure in Pune was Rs 4.5lakh," said Pednekar, a Mira-Road resident. "In Mumbai, post-surgery, I would have had to recover in the general ward as an A/C twin-sharing room costs over Rs2,500. But in Pune, I could opt for the privacy of a single room for Rs950 per day."

Matunga-based Sheila Patwardhan also chose a Pune hospital to undergo a knee replacement surgery. "The hospital made arrangements for my stay, surgery and post-operation recovery, including physiotherapy. I could afford a deluxe A/C room, which took care of my daughter's accommodation as well," she said.

Dr Narendra Vaidya, orthopedic and joint replacement surgeon at the Lokmanya Tilak Hospital in Pune, says there are two factors involved when a patient considers surgery. "One, of course, is the pricing. The second is quality. Pune offers a combination of the two: the expertise of several internationally-qualified surgeons at a relatively cheaper price," he said.

"The surgeon's charges are significantly cheaper in Pune, as are the operation theatre and bed charges," said Dr Shailesh Niyogi, director, Lokmanya Tilak Hospital, adding, "With the Expressway, the distance between Mumbai and Pune has lessened. That is another influencing factor."

The hospital sees 20-odd patients for knee replacement and over 60 patients for spine surgery from Mumbai.

"Money is an important factor. And since technical expertise is available in both the cities, patients have started considering surgery in Pune," said Dr Mahesh Kulkarni, orthopaedic surgeon at Pune's Aditya Birla Hospital.

Spine surgeon Dr Rajesh Parasnis, who practised at the Breach Candy Hospital before moving to Pune's Ruby Hall Clinic and Oyster and Pearl Hospital, said, "Super speciality surgeries like microscopic disc, spinal deformity surgeries and nucleoplasty

can be done in Pune as well. The latter costs between Rs28-34,000 in Pune compared to Rs 1lakh in Mumbai.”

“I have a lot of clients from Mumbai, for IVF as well as endoscopy surgery for fibroid and other treatments,” said Dr Sunita Tandulwadkar, chief director, Ruby Hall IVF endoscopy centre, adding that she sees five to 10 patients from Mumbai in a week.

“I don’t know if patients are coming for the difference in cost or the quality of treatment,” she said.

Consultancy charges of super specialists too are exorbitant in Mumbai (Rs800-1,200) compared to Pune (Rs300-400). “A patient can travel to Pune for consultation and go back to Mumbai for Rs1,200,” Dr Parasnis said.