NEWS LESSON

Would You Fly Abroad for Cheaper Surgery?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you travel abroad for a service that cost less?
2. What makes you trust a clinic's before-and-after photos?
3. How much should appearance matter in how someone feels about themselves?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**prospective**	☐	A	likely to become something in the future
2	**logistical**	☐	B	not the same every time
3	**practitioner**	☐	C	not special or surprising
4	**variable**	☐	D	to do with organising the practical details
5	**reframes**	☐	E	make something seem usual and ordinary
6	**normalise**	☐	F	describes in a new way so that people see it differently
7	**unremarkable**	☐	G	shaped by what customers want and buy
8	**consumer-driven**	☐	H	a person who works in a profession, such as medicine

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

You are comparing a quote at home with a cheaper package in Istanbul that includes the hotel and transfers. A low price does not show how complications would be handled, and neither does the strongest advertising.

1 You are comparing two quotes for a hair transplant. One is from a clinic at home. The other is from Istanbul, at a considerably lower price, with a hotel and airport transfers included. The cheaper offer is tempting, and it is also surgery in another country. Once a comparatively discreet procedure, hair transplantation is now marketed through international clinics, online testimonials and packages combining surgery with accommodation and transport.

2 The procedure typically involves transferring hair follicles from one part of the scalp to areas affected by hair loss. Techniques have evolved, but the treatment remains surgery, with medical risks and variable results. A successful transplant depends on factors including the patient's existing hair, the skill of the practitioner and the management of expectations over the months that follow.

3 Financial considerations are central to the appeal. Reporting in March 2026 highlighted how procedures in Istanbul could cost considerably less than similar treatment in much of western Europe or North America. The convenience of package deals reduces the logistical difficulties of travelling abroad for care, yet it can also encourage customers to approach a surgical decision as though they were weighing up an ordinary holiday.

4 Competition on that scale cuts both ways. Lower prices have made the procedure affordable to more people. They also make the choice harder to assess: the clinic with the strongest advertising is not necessarily the one offering the best care. A patient comparing offers from another country has limited means of telling them apart, and the ordinary safeguards, a familiar health system and a practitioner one can go back to, may be harder to reach.

5 Professional standards therefore deserve careful scrutiny. Prospective patients need reliable information about qualifications, about who actually performs each stage of the procedure, about the possibility of infection or scarring, and about access to follow-up care once they are home. A low advertised price says nothing about how complications would be handled, and marketing material has an obvious incentive to gloss over them.

6 The small print rewards attention for a further reason. Hair transplantation is a slow business: growth emerges gradually, the final result cannot be judged for many months, and some patients require additional sessions. A clinic that is candid about that timetable is offering something more valuable than an attractive quotation.

7 The industry's growth also reflects shifting attitudes towards appearance and masculinity. Some people experience hair loss as a threat to confidence; others regard baldness as an unremarkable feature of ageing. Neither response is inherently more authentic than the other. The ethical concern arises when advertising reframes a normal physical change as an insecurity demanding immediate correction.

8 Nor is the pressure evenly distributed. A procedure that was once largely invisible is now documented, compared and reviewed in public, which makes it both easier to research and harder to ignore. Visibility of that kind tends to normalise a treatment long before most people have examined whether it suits them.

9 Istanbul's success shows how international competition can broaden access to elective treatment while making medical decisions increasingly consumer-driven. For an individual considering a transplant, the sensible question is not where the procedure is cheapest, but whether its benefits, limitations and risks have been understood without the pressure of a persuasive sales pitch.

Sources: The Guardian. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer treats both a low price and strong advertising as unreliable signs of quality. T F NG
2. The writer argues that people who choose treatment are more authentic than those who accept baldness. T F NG
3. Complications are more common in Istanbul than in western Europe. T F NG
4. The writer suggests that public reviews and comparisons can shape attitudes before people have judged whether a transplant suits them. T F NG
5. The writer implies that a clinic's honesty about timing is worth less than an attractive price. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

bias	candid	disclaimer	discreet	incentive	safeguards	scrutiny	testimonials

1. After several complaints, the clinic's claims were subjected to close _____ by the health authority.
2. Unusually, the surgeon was _____ about the limits of the treatment and told her it might not work.
3. Salespeople paid on commission have an obvious _____ to exaggerate what a treatment can achieve.
4. In a national health system, _____ such as formal complaints procedures protect patients; abroad, they may not exist.
5. The website relied on glowing _____ from former clients rather than any independent evidence.
6. Hair transplants were once a _____ matter, carried out quietly and rarely discussed in public.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The _____ of cheap flights has made treatment abroad affordable to far more people. **(AVAILABLE)**
2. Patients should insist on full _____ of who will carry out each stage of the operation. **(DISCLOSE)**
3. A lack of _____ is a real worry when the clinic is thousands of miles from the patient's home. **(ACCOUNT)**
4. In such a _____ market, the loudest advertiser is not necessarily the best surgeon. **(COMPETE)**
5. Online reviews are rarely a _____ guide to surgical skill. **(RELY)**

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many of these are figurative: the meaning is not the sum of the two words. Learn the whole verb, and notice that down often means 'reduce' and out often means 'exclude'.

cash	pass	play	rule	shy	tell	weigh

1. Sales brochures tend to _____ down the risks while highlighting dramatic results.
2. It is wise to _____ up the benefits against the dangers before committing to surgery.
3. Patients with certain health conditions may need to _____ out the operation altogether.
4. It can be hard to _____ apart two clinics when both rely on similar glowing reviews.
5. Some patients _____ away from asking awkward questions because they do not want to seem rude.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What would you want to know beyond the headline price?
2. When does a cosmetic choice become pressure to look a certain way?
3. Should the support after a procedure matter as much as the procedure itself?

9 Role-play: is the cheap package worth it?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the friend

Your friend wants to fly to Istanbul for a hair transplant because it's much cheaper. You're worried. Ask about the clinic, the surgeon and the help after the operation. Say what you'd do.

Student B · the traveller

You've found a cheap package in Istanbul with a hotel and airport transfers. You want to book it this week. Explain why it's a good deal and answer your friend's worries.

Useful phrases

I've found a much cheaper package in Istanbul.

What happens if something goes wrong when I'm home?

Have you checked the surgeon's qualifications?

I'd feel safer if we shopped around first.

I'm not trying to push you into it.

Could we compromise and wait a month?

Afterwards, tell the class: did the traveller decide to book, wait or look for another clinic?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 A · 2 D · 3 H · 4 B · 5 F · 6 E · 7 C · 8 G

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 scrutiny · 2 candid · 3 incentive · 4 safeguards · 5 testimonials · 6 discreet

6 Word forms

1 availability · 2 disclosure · 3 accountability · 4 competitive · 5 reliable

7 Language focus

1 play · 2 weigh · 3 rule · 4 tell · 5 shy

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