

Emotional issues

- Considering a treatment abroad, whether legal or not in your home country, can be overwhelming. You may find it helpful to share your plans with a trusted friend or family member, with members of a patient organisation or with a counsellor. The latter is bound to professional discretion, so anything you may share with him or her, will be confidential.
- Not all clinics provide counselling prior to treatment and very few are likely to provide counselling in your native language. It can be helpful to explore emotional issues with a counsellor in your country, even if he or she is not familiar with infertility treatment in the country where you are intending to undergo treatment.
- If you are considering creating a child through gamete/embryo donation or surrogacy and intend to travel abroad for treatment, exploring all the short and long term implications of this with a specialist fertility counsellor before you make a final decision can be very beneficial. It is particularly important where the proposed treatment is either illegal in your home country and/or where access to donor information and potential contact with donors is different as this can raise complex emotions, as well as legal and social issues, for you which may in turn affect the strong and healthy family you are hoping to build.
- It is also helpful to think about the kind of support you may need alongside and after treatment, once you have returned home. If you have already established a relationship with a counsellor, he or she may be able to offer continuing support throughout your attempts to build a family of your own.

Future issues

- How long are medical records kept? Do you know what is likely to happen to these records if your clinic closes down? In rare circumstances, medical information about the donor may become vital for a child conceived by gamete donation.
- Do you want to ensure that your child has access to information about his or her biological/genetic origins? How can you ensure this in those countries that do not have legal clarification in this respect?
- In the countries where anonymity of donor egg/sperm/embryo still remains what information does the clinic give regarding the donor conceived child's biological background?
- How might you help your child reconcile the loss of cultural inheritance?

General

Ensure that you are as well informed and as prepared as possible. If you have questions, don't hesitate to contact the local/national patient support organisations; they are familiar with medical practice in their country and can usually help.

iCSI an international alliance of infertility patient organisations, strongly supports equal access to high quality medical treatment. In some countries, as a result of cultural and/or religious beliefs or of the general economic situation, only limited options to access ART are available. We strive towards providing individuals and couples access to non-discriminatory and high-quality ART so that they are able to try to fulfil their wish to build a family.

The **Infertility Consumer Support for Infertility (iCSI)** is committed to empowering patients to become full partners in ART healthcare and public policy, by building effective relationships with providers, governments and media worldwide.

To further this vision and mission objectives, an international meeting of patient leaders is regularly held prior to the annual meeting of the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE).

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Travelling abroad for assisted reproductive technology (ART) treatment



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Introduction

An increasing number of countries have passed legislation in the area of assisted reproductive technology (ART) treatment. In some countries, such legislation has been seen to limit the type of treatment possible prior to the introduction of legislation. In others, it has been seen to provide a respected framework for medical treatment in the area of ART. Travelling abroad in order to obtain treatment not available in an individual's home country has been practised for many years and has, according to the experience of many patient organisations, increased over this time. This fact sheet provides an outline of issues to consider when travelling abroad and aims to raise awareness of the potential complexities when undergoing ART procedures in a foreign country.

Reasons to seek treatment abroad

The following are the most common reasons to seek treatment abroad:

- Certain medical treatments are unavailable in the home country for legal reasons; for example, in many countries, egg or sperm donation is forbidden. As an example, women who experience premature menopause or men who have been diagnosed as azoospermic cannot be treated in their home country. These individuals or couples may seek treatment in neighbouring countries where donor assisted conception is accepted and practised.
- Some countries provide a comprehensive range of ART treatments but do not have the resources to carry these out in ways which respect internationally accepted best standards. Patients travel abroad in order to access high-quality ART.
- There is a lack of resources in specific areas. In some countries, egg donation may be accepted and practised but the waiting list is long. In other cases, couples may wish to undergo donor insemination using the sperm of a man of the same or a similar minority ethnicity and/or faith as the future father; such a donor may be unavailable in the home country of this couple.
- Treatment may not be illegal but declined by clinics in the home country for moral reasons and/or a lack of legal framework. Treating lesbian and single women with donor sperm is a typical example.
- Some couples do not want others to know that they are seeking medical treatment to have a child. Travelling abroad for treatment ensures this confidentiality. Others may want the option to choose a donor themselves and prefer identifiable donors, an option not available in some countries.
- Couples who have moved to a country may prefer

undergoing treatment in their previous home country.

- ART may be less costly in a different country than in the home country.
- There are countries that have traditionally been visited for balneotherapy or physiotherapy because these services are less expensive than in the patient's home country. Travelling to such countries for reproductive services may be perceived to be attractive not only for financial reasons but also as a result of these traditions.

Information

Having comprehensive information about ART abroad is usually the greatest challenge. Although many clinics have staff who speaks English or other languages, it can be difficult for both staff and patient to communicate in a different language to their native one. Furthermore, information about treatment details as well as legal implications, especially in cases involving gamete donation or surrogacy, may be very complex and seem quite confusing. Relying solely on information posted on the internet is usually not advisable. In many countries, there are patient organisations that can be contacted for information about their country and the practical support available. ICSI has compiled a list of most patient organisation on www.icsi.ws.

Issues to consider

The following issues and questions can become relevant if you consider seeking treatment abroad. In this list, you will not only find questions about the physical treatment, but also issues concerning financial, legal, emotional and long-term implications for the family you plan to build.

Medical issues

- Is the type of treatment you are seeking abroad appropriate for your specific circumstances? If uncertain, can you consult a medical expert to clarify this?
- Is a clinic in your home country able to provide information on the treatment you are considering?
- Is it possible to have some of the initial investigations and early monitoring of treatment in your home country, i.e. ovulation induction, specific examinations, ultrasound scans, monitoring of ovarian stimulation etc?
- Do you know which medical examinations and tests will be performed on the donor? Is the donor in on-going observation after egg retrieval to ensure that complications can be treated quickly?
- Is the person donating gametes (egg/sperm) or embryos a citizen of the said country or is the sperm/ egg/embryo imported or the donor recruited from another country?

- What follow-up and after care is provided for you – where and by whom?

Financial issues

- Does your health insurance (or any other reimbursement provider) cover the total or partial cost for treatment abroad? This is not commonly the case, but may be the case if EU citizens seek treatment within the EU.
- Is a clinic in your home country willing to provide any follow-up treatment that may become necessary and are these costs reimbursed by your health insurance?
- Do you understand how much the various parts of the treatment cost? Are you aware of the payment/compensation given to the donor? Is this sum morally acceptable in your view?
- Are you reimbursed for any pre-treatment that may be carried out in your home country?
- Bear in mind that treatment abroad not only involves the direct cost for medical intervention, but travelling and accommodation. Furthermore, there are additional costs difficult to ascertain prior to treatment. These include travelling between hotel and clinic, meals in restaurants as well as all the extra expenses of being away from home.

Legal issues

- If you are considering gamete donation, are you fully informed about the legal implications, i.e. legal paternity and/or maternity following gamete donation in your home country; the rights and responsibilities of donors in their home country or the recruiting country; the rights or possibilities for a donor conceived person to access information about his or her biological origins?
- Is it advisable and permitted to draw up a legal document in order to clarify the legal implications for all parties involved?
- In the case of surrogacy: what is the legislation regarding the maternal rights of the surrogate and the recipient mother and/or father in both your and the surrogate's home country? Is it advisable and permitted to draw up a legal document?
- Seek independent legal advice before embarking on surrogacy arrangements in another country. Ensure you have the necessary documentation to bring your child back into your own country.
- Prior to commencing treatment, ensure that you have received complete medical and financial documentation. This may be vital for later reimbursement in your home country and/or for any future treatment you may consider.