

GENDER REASSIGNMENT

Thailand big draw for sex change surgeries

CHEAPER Eager patients are compromising on quality, say doctors

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MUMBAI: Thailand is not just a cheap holiday destination. According to city doctors, several Indians wanting to undergo sex reassignment surgery travel to the country as its clinics allegedly offer attractive packages. Thailand has a large transgender population.

"Recently, a couple of patients approached me with inquiries about sex reassignment surgeries. But when I told them that I only operate on two to three patients in a month, they chose to fly to Thailand where doctors do two to three surgeries a day," said Dr Anil Tibrewala, plastic surgeon, Hinduja Hospital.

Shreya Lalwani, who underwent a sex reassignment surgery at Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital (KDAH), Andheri, in March, said she had initially explored the option of undergoing the surgery at Thailand. "I decided on Mumbai because it would have been easier to do the follow-ups here," said Lalwani, a resident of Ganshidham in Gujarat.

"My patients tell me that Thailand clinics are so popular that they have a waiting list for the surgery," said Dr Dheeraj Kapoor, endocrinologist, KDAH.

He claimed that he conducted hormone replacement therapy for seven patients last year, of which six went to Thailand for the surgery.

Dr Mohan Thomas, cosmetic surgeon at Breach Candy Hospital in south Mumbai, said: "Patients look at Thailand as a relatively cheaper option for the surgery sometimes even compromising on the credentials of these clinics."

SEX CHANGE REGULATIONS

Gender identity disorder is a conflict between a person's actual physical gender and the gender that person identifies himself or herself as. Bidhan Barua thinks he is a girl

TIGHTER LAWS: Though there was no bar earlier, in 2009, the Medical Council of Thailand enforced new regulations allowing only trans-

gender people aged over 18 years to undergo a sex change operation. Sex change for those aged 18 to 20 must have parental consent, along with approval of two psychiatrists

NO RECOGNITION: Some jurisdictions in the US and other countries do not recognise a person who has had sex change surgery in a foreign country as being the new sex.

SEX REASSIGNMENT SURGERY

COST IN THAILAND: Between ₹1 lakh and ₹2.5 lakh

COST IN INDIA: Between ₹2.5 lakh to ₹8 lakh in a private hospital

Confusion over where Barua will be operated

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MUMBAI: On Wednesday, confusion prevailed on which hospital Bidhan Barua, 21, would undergo his sex reassignment surgery at.

Barua maintained that his surgery would be done in Saifee Hospital by plastic surgeon Dr Kalpesh Gajjiwala, as planned. However, hospital authorities stated that Barua would not be operated upon at Saifee.

The Bombay high court on Monday allowed Barua, a Guwahati resident, to go ahead with a sex change surgery if he so desired. Barua's parents had allegedly threatened doctors at Saifee and stalled his sex reassignment surgery scheduled last month.

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EJAZ NAQVI
Barua's lawyer

will operate on him. No one has told us that the surgery is not taking place. But the date of surgery is not fixed. We would like to keep it under wraps and do not want any more trouble. My client is desperate to get his surgery done," said Barua's lawyer, Ejaz Naqvi.

Dr Gajjiwala refused to comment on the issue.

Dr SJ Bapai, assistant director, public relations and government administration, Saifee Hospital said, "The patient (Barua) has not come to us. I do not know where the surgery is taking place."