

Medical Reports

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Passport For Pain

Gastric by-pass is life saving surgery for a lot of people that has left desperate patients looking for cheaper surgeries out of the country, but for some of them this trip for a new life ends up as a Passport For Pain.

WSVN -- Carnie Wilson and Star Jones went from fat to fit after undergoing gastric bypass and that's made the procedure popular. For 27-year old Melanie Centeno, the surgery was her last chance after battling obesity most of her adult life.

Melanie Centeno: "Before my surgery I was 295 pounds, but I was healthy, I was fine."

Her health insurance refused to pay for the surgery that can cost up to \$28,000 in U.S. Hospitals. Desperate, she went on line and found a surgeon in Colombia who could do it for much less.

Melanie Centeno: "It totaled \$8,000."

For months, she and the doctor emailed back and forth. He also flew to Miami to meet with her several times they went over every last detail.

Melanie Centeno: "We were going to have a 24-hour nurse, three meals a day, the hotel."

So with high hopes, she made the trip in October of 2006. When she arrived at Colombia, all of the doctor's promises were broken. In fact, the doctor she met with wasn't even going to perform the surgery.

Melanie Centeno: "He didn't explain why and at that point, I felt uneasy."

She considered backing out, but the alternative was to return home without hope of becoming thin. So despite her fears, she decided to go ahead. After the surgery she was in severe pain, but doctors told her that was normal and released her to fly home.

Melanie Centeno: "So when I came back I thought I was perfectly fine, that I was just healing."

And she was losing weight, so based on what the doctors told her she thought the pain was normal. Until one day when she couldn't even keep down a sip of water. She was rushed to the emergency room, the news wasn't good.

Dr. Nestor de la Cruz-Munoz: "Without the treatment she would have died."

Doctors performed emergency surgery gastric acids were leaking into her body damaging her organs.

Doctors say, extreme cases like Melanie's are becoming all too common. Some of the foreign clinics make gastric bypass look easy.

Dr. Rafael Azuaje: "Bariatric surgery is not like a hernia surgery or appendicitis where you go get your appendix taken out and then that's it."

Reported by:

[Belkys Nerey](#)

Producer:

Janna Owen

Contact

jowen@wsvn.com

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And more websites are popping up promising cheap and easy surgeries. Look at some we found, this one makes the surgery sound little more dangerous than a spa vacation.

Dr. Rafael Azuaje: "Sometimes they offer a trip, a vacation type of trip, 5-star hotel."

All of the doctors we talked to say there are good surgeons in other countries, the issue is this type of surgery. Gastric bypass requires patients to be closely monitored for months after the surgery.

Melanie was never able to connect with her doctor in Colombia to see what he had to say about her problems.

Melanie Centeno: "I cannot reach him, I have left several messages on the machine. I have e-mailed, I have not gotten a response since."

Meanwhile, she's had several major surgeries and is only alive with the help of a drain attached to her body. And it's not over yet. She faces more surgery she can't work and is dependent on her family to take care of her.

Melanie Centeno: "And it's not worth no amount of money to fly to another country and be lied to, and be robbed of almost your life. It's not worth it."

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Surgical Weight Loss Institute

Mercy Outpatient Center

3659 South Miami Avenue

Suite 5002

Miami, FL 33133

305-856-4385

www.gastricbypassmiami.com

American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery

www.asbs.org

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