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Questions to ask your doctor before your operation

Each year thousands of people in the UK undergo private surgery, paid for by their health insurance or paid for by themselves (self-pay surgery). Before selecting your surgeon, or agreeing to go ahead with a private operation, it's important that you are fully informed. There are benefits to every operation; but there are also associated risks.

This checklist (published by **Shoulderdoc.co.uk**) of questions to ask your doctor will ensure that you get the feedback you need to make an informed decision about going private for your operation. Take this checklist to your consultation or write out your own list of questions. Ask the doctor if you can record the consultation so that you can play it back afterwards. (It's a stressful situation; people often forget much of what they have been told or fail to take it in.)

Making the decision

- *Do you have any advice leaflets or video material about this operation that I can use?*
- *Are there any published papers about this operation that you would recommend?*
- *Are there any web sites that you recommend that would be informative?*
- *What are the risks involved in this operation? How likely are these risks?*
- *How much improvement can I expect from this kind of operation?*
- *What can I expect if I decide not to have the operation?*
- *What are the alternative treatments/options to having the operation?*

If I decide to delay the operation, what are the implications of this?



The surgeon

- *What is your experience of doing this type of surgery?*
- *How many operations of this type do you carry out each year in the NHS and in the private sector?*
- *What are your success rates for this operation?*
- *Do you have any additional certification/qualifications that make you more experienced in performing this operation? (See our list of medical qualifications)*
- *What is the rate of complications that you experience with this kind of operation?*
- *Can I speak to any of your past patients?*

The hospital or clinic

- *Where will the surgery be carried out?*
- *What are the back up medical facilities there, if something goes wrong during the operation?*
- *How often do you operate there?*
- *Where else do you operate?*
- *Do I have a choice of private hospital or clinic where the operation is carried out?*
- *What is the post-operative infection rate at the clinic/hospital where the operation will take place?*

Payment terms

- *These questions depend on how you are paying for surgery.*
- *Are you covered by health insurance, or are you paying for yourself? It may be more appropriate for you to direct these questions to the private hospital or clinic.*
- *What is included in the price?*
- *What is not included in the price?*
- *What happens if something goes wrong and I need further treatment or another operation? Who pays for your additional fees? Who pays for the additional hospital costs?*

The operation

- *How long will I have to stay in the hospital?*
- *How long does the operation last?*
- *What type of anaesthesia will be used? What are the risks of this type of anaesthesia?*
- *What can I expect after the operation?*
- *For joint replacements:*
 - *What type of joint replacement/prosthesis will be used?*
 - *What is the success rate for this type of joint replacement/prosthesis?*
 - *Where can I find more information about this type of joint replacement/prosthesis?*
 - *How long will the joint replacement/prosthesis last?*

After the operation

- *How much pain is it normal to expect after the operation? How long will the pain last?*
- *What complications can occur with this kind of operation?*
- *How soon can I have visitors?*
- *Will I need physiotherapy after the operation? For how long? Where will this take place?*
- *What help will I need at home after the operation? For how long will I need help?*
- *How long will it be before I can go back to work?*
- *What restrictions will there be on my normal activities after the operation? For example, will I be able to drive/climb stairs/run/play sport/have sex/take a bath?*
- *When will I need to come back for a follow up appointment?*