From England to India: a Hep C Journey

March 1, 2016 By Greg Jefferys

A lot of folk are flying to India to pick up the generic Hep C medicines themselves. Some just fly in and fly out. One guy I know jumped on a plane from Alaska, flew to India, met a supplier I put him in contact with there, stayed one night and flew back to Alaska with 6 months supplier of generic Indian Harvoni. He was away from home for four days and changed his life entirely.

A man in his 60's was too ill to fly to India himself and lives in a country that prohits all imports of generic meds. So his daughter, young woman in her mid 20's, jumped on a plane and flew to India to save her father's life. We arranged for her to meet a reliable supplier at the airport. He was waiting for her outside the airport with the meds. She paid him, walked back into the airport and flew home. She was in India for less than 10 hours and returned home with the medicines that would save her father's life. He is now 6 weeks into treatment with generic Harvoni.

So people are doing this everyday. Some are in India for a couple of days and some stay for a few months and do their whole treatment in India.

Below is a the account of a guy from England who stopped over for a few days on his way to Thailand.

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I have genotype 1 and previously failed a long and hard, interferon based triple treatment. So the prospect of the new Harvoni treatment...just 1 pill per day, minimal side effects and a 95% success rate...was something I really wanted to do. However there are currently long waiting lists in the UK for an NHS treatment and to do this privately costs more than £50K. I decided to research the costs of just buying generic harvoni in India and stumbled across Greg Jefferys' blog.

Having emailed Greg a few times for information, I decided to go to Chennai and pick up the meds directly...mainly because I was due to travel to Bangkok and it was easy to build in a stop over as Chennai's en route from the UK.

Greg recommended I contact a particular Pharma rep he knew in Chennai prior to making any bookings, which I did by email. The rep was very organised and told me all I needed was a valid prescription for harvoni generics and suggested a hospital and consultant if I needed this done in India. He told me to email again a few days before arrival in Chennai and then confirmed he would meet with me after I got the prescription.

As I couldn't find a UK Doctor who would write a prescription for Indian generic harvoni, I needed to book to see a consultant in India. I used the Apollo hospital in Chennai and they have an International patient liaison online so I was able to complete all necessary paperwork to book an appointment with a consultant gastroenterologist (recommended by the pharma rep) from the UK.

If you do this you then just need to print off the documentation and this saves completing a lengthy form

when registering at the hospital on appointment day.

The consultant only needed to see something official stating I did have hep c but I had my GP print out my most recent blood tests, including viral load, my last fibroscan and the letter showing I failed interferon triple at SVR 12 as well. I chose an early morning appointment to allow for unexpected delays.

The hospital itself was quite a chaotic experience and I was glad to have allowed 45 minutes to register and find the correct atrium for the consultant. You need to follow signs for International patients on the ground floor just to the right of the main entrance. They check over your passport and the online form and booking and then send you to the cashier next to the pharmacy at the entrance and it costs 250 IN rupees to register (under £3).

There is no real queue system so you need to hold your place firmly and make sure the cashier knows you want to register. The cashier issues your hospital folder and directs you to the correct floor and atrium. This was well signed but you need to negotiate the crowds of patients lining every corridor. The appointment with the consultant was quick and efficient. He discussed my condition and issued the prescription. This cost 1000 INR (£11) payable before leaving the atrium.

With the prescription in my possession, I called the rep Greg Jefferys recommended and he came to my hotel within a couple of hours. The agreed price of 59 400 INR (£660 at that exchange rate) was paid in cash and he issued 3x unopened bottles of Myhep Lvir, correctly packaged and stamped with recent manufacture dates, each with 28 pills inside. He also issued a receipt for purchase and photographed my prescription in case I need to order more and want to have these delivered to the UK by DHL for a courier fee.

I had allowed 3 days in Chennai to do this, expecting delays, however completed the entire process in half a day, allowing plenty of time for some sight seeing, shopping and eating before heading on to Thailand. I decided not to start the meds until returning to the UK as I was a little worried about side effects while abroad.

I have now started – 3 days in and just headache and upset stomach so far – but I also still need to establish exactly how I will monitor progress in the UK as I am not strictly attached to any NHS programme for this treatment. I am hoping that the hep c unit that administered the interferon triple will do my blood work and have offered to sign a waiver of liability as they are concerned that the meds were not NHS issued. They are yet to get back to me and did not come through for me when I asked for baseline tests before going to India.

Instead I managed to get my GP to ask for the baseline blood work including viral load and I am hoping that the GP will again be able to ask for these monthly. The results are fairly easy to read as there is a range for each function tested and these are highlighted when they are outside of the expected range. A GP has a good idea of if a particular reading is to be watched or is worrying and needs acting on. Should this occur, I will be able to ask a specific question to the consultant heptologist. My feeling is that I survived 7 months on the interferon triple and am hoping for fewer side effects from the Indian harvoni generics.

Many thanks to Greg Jefferys as I was at a low ebb in January when I contacted him, feeling the treatment I needed was not available to me. It has been an uplifting experience to take control of the situation and have an affordable option presented and get the meds.

As I understand it people from the UK do not need to travel to India to get these as Greg tells me it is both easy and legal to have them shipped from India but either way, I would advise to follow Greg’s advice to ensure a reputable supplier as there will inevitably be fakes coming onto the market and unscrupulous vendors who will take advantage.
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