

## UK expat reports about her experience in Greek public health hospital - Keep Talking Greece

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We hear a lot about the public health care system in Greece and it is mostly negative reports about shortage of personnel and stuff, delays in operations and appointments with doctors. Tessa Cross, an expat from the UK, has something different to report. In a e-mail to KTG, Tessa expresses her gratitude to the medical and nursing staff of the public hospital in Agios Nikolaos on the island of Crete.

*I recently underwent a total hip replacement operation at the General Hospital here in Agios Nikolaos. As I am a British person, now living in Agios Nikolaos, I wanted to highlight how the level of care here differs from that in the UK. Hopefully this will help those local people who have never known any other healthcare system appreciate how good the healthcare here actually is. In addition, since my husband and I spent almost 12 years living in the Mediterranean on our sailing yacht, and have experienced emergency medical care in Spain, Italy, and Turkey, I'm able to compare the levels of care we experienced in those countries with that here too.*

*The first, and biggest, difference with the UK is how easy it is to access healthcare here. The date of my surgery was arranged to suit me and my future plans, rather than me being expected to fit in with what the hospital or the surgeon wanted - as happens in the UK. Maria Katsafarou, my orthopaedic surgeon, was very accessible and more than happy to spend as much time as I needed to explain what was going to happen. In the UK it is almost impossible for a patient to be able to question the consultant surgeon in this way, at best you only ever get to speak to the junior doctors, you very often never see the consultant surgeon at all.*

*Another obvious difference was in the quality of the orthopaedic ward. I understand that a new orthopaedic ward will be opening on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor soon, so the poor state that the 1<sup>st</sup> floor ward I was in can be understood. However, even though the curtains were held up by paper clips, the toilet door wouldn't open fully, and none of call buttons worked, the cleaners came round every day, mopping the floor to keep the ward and the toilets clean. The ward wasn't good but it was adequate and it did the job.*

*In the UK you can usually choose your meals from a small menu, but even there hospital food is still, well - hospital food. It's not what you'd call exciting. In the hospital here there was no choice, but I was very impressed with the quality and nutritional value of the meals here. A simple breakfast and two hot meals a day is all you need to build strength during your recovery. It wasn't food I would choose in a restaurant of course, but it was tasty and filling and much better than I had been led to expect.*

*The most important resource in any organisation is the people, and the people who work in the hospital here are superb. From the lowest cleaner to Maria Spinthouri, the CEO of the hospital, everyone had a smile and took the time to spend a few minutes with me helping me to feel better. The nurses are nothing less than superstars. Because I don't speak much Greek they were all making a special effort to talk to me in English. At no time did a nurse come and do anything without speaking to me and asking me how I was, I never at any time felt that I was just another patient. Every member of staff had a smile and made me feel special and important, and was prepared to do whatever they could to make me comfortable and help me to recover.*

*Nobody enjoys being in hospital of course, but the dedicated, well trained, and caring staff at the hospital here made my stay as pleasant and enjoyable as it was possible to be. The level of care I received here was the equal of anything I have experienced in the UK, and much better than my experiences in Spain, Italy, and Turkey. We may not appreciate it but here in Agios Nikolaos we are very lucky to have a hospital with such a high standard of care and with such amazing people. Thank you all!*



*Tessa Cross*

To this report I should add that I have heard several positive experiences foreigners living in Greece have made in public but mostly regional hospitals. In big cities like Athens or Thessaloniki, the situation can be quite different though on many different levels.

Any wants to share own experience with the Greek public health care system? Please, send your text to [keeptalkinggreeceATgmail.com](mailto:keeptalkinggreeceATgmail.com)