

Dark side of sunny Spain for Britain's elderly expatriates

It is a familiar sight in any British hospital – older women in blue sashes staffing at makeshift charity stall in a busy corridor. But here is Denia Hospital on Spain's Costa Blanca, the *volunteers* have no time to serve tea. The expat-run charity Help is **indispensable**, providing interpreting and sometimes nursing and **aftercare** for the growing number of British patients that pass through here. Tens of thousands of British *settlers* pursuing a **dream** retirement in the sun have doubled the population in this area in the past two years – and put a growing **strain** on a creaking Spanish health service.

Now Spanish authorities say they are placing an unbearable *burden* on **scant** medical resources and are demanding that the UK pays for their care. And in a move likely to send a chill through the expat *community*, Spanish doctors - even those who speak English – are now refusing to treat anyone who cannot speak Spanish without an interpreter present.

Dr Diego Vargas, a spokesman for the Spanish Society of General Medicine, says the language barrier is a medical **risk**. 'It makes diagnosis difficult – even doubling consultation time – and can give rise to serious misunderstandings and errors, for which the doctor will be held responsible.'

Research by the society shows a large increase in *expatriates* presenting with serious conditions at hospitals throughout the Spanish costas, but fewer than 10 per cent can **communicate** with staff, with almost a third *relying on* hand gestures and phrase books.

Jill Porter Smith, 75, who retired here from Cambridge 25 years ago, volunteers at Denia Hospital five days a week. 'Most of our clinics now have a sign over the door saying, 'Non-Spanish speakers will not be seen without an interpreter', but with only a handful speaking fluent Spanish in a community of over 40,000, our volunteers are **stretched** to the limit. It's not unusual to deal with British people who have lived here over 20 years and *complain* about medical staff not speaking English. Because waiters and barmen speak English, they expect doctors to.'

The society is now calling for extra **resources** to deal with the rising **costs**. Regional health authorities complain that providing drugs, health, and social care for more than a million ageing Brits – and to a lesser extent, Germans and Dutch – is *crippling*, prompting the Spanish Health Minister, Elena Salgado, to demand an annual £40m from the UK government.

She says expats abuse the system by using health facilities without registering as residents. 'Many are *relocating* to Spain and receiving medical **treatment** for serious conditions more quickly and of a high standard unavailable to them on their own NHS but, as many of these are 'invisible' residents and have no appropriate medical **cover**, Spain is recouping only a *fraction* of the costs of treating them,' she told fellow ministers.

Read the article and answer these questions.

1. What three things is the charity Help providing British patients?
2. What are Spanish doctors refusing to do?
3. How is the language barrier affecting consultation time with expats?
4. How many expat British patients use hand gestures and phrase books to communicate?
5. How do expats abuse the Spanish health care system?

Complete the sentences using the underlined words in the text. There are more words than sentences.

1. The large number of British people settling on the Costa Blanca are increasing the _____ on the Spanish health service.
2. Research by the Spanish Society of General Medicine indicates that a minority of expats can _____ with staff.
3. The Spanish Society of General Medicine is now asking for extra _____ to help with the rise in expenditure.
4. The charity Help, which is run by expats, is _____ to the expat community.
5. Dr Diego Vargas says that the lack of clear communication is a medical _____.
6. Many experts, according to the Spanish Health Minister, don't have suitable medical _____.

Find the words corresponding to the definitions. The words are written in *italics*.

1. a person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task - _____
2. a person who arrives, especially from another country, in a new place in order to live there - _____
3. a person who lives outside their native country - _____
4. express dissatisfaction or annoyance about something - _____
5. be unable to manage without - _____
6. a small part; a bit - _____
7. a group of people living in the same locality and under the same government - _____
8. a responsibility or duty - _____
9. to move to a new place - _____
10. a damaged or defective object or device - _____

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