

A photograph of a patient lying in a hospital bed, wearing a white gown and a white identification band. A family member's hand is gently holding the patient's hand, providing support. The background is softly blurred, focusing on the hands.

Your Journey Abroad

**A Practical Guide for
Patients and Families
Travelling Abroad for
Treatment**

In collaboration with the
Treatment Abroad Unit, MDH



Karl Vella
foundation

Dear families,

On behalf of the Karl Vella Foundation (KVF), I extend my heartfelt welcome to you and your loved ones. We understand that needing to travel overseas for medical treatment can be an overwhelming experience; one filled with uncertainty, challenges, and hope. At such times, no one should feel alone.



KVF was established with a simple yet powerful mission: to offer emotional, practical, and psychosocial support to families facing serious illness. Whether you are a patient or a family member, we are here to walk beside you, helping you navigate the journey with compassion, understanding, and care.

This booklet has been designed to provide you with essential information, guidance, and reassurance as you prepare for treatment abroad. We hope it serves as a helpful companion throughout your whole journey, a source of comfort and clarity when you need it most.

Please remember that support is always available. Our dedicated team at KVF is just a call or message away, ready to listen and assist in any way we can.

I wish you strength, courage, and peace of mind throughout your journey.

Ms Claire Chircop
Chairperson
Karl Vella Foundation



Karl Vella
foundation
Here to Care

Why was I referred for treatment abroad?

Families may be referred to different hospitals across the UK and Europe depending on the specific expertise required for a particular condition.

While Malta provides high-quality healthcare, certain highly specialised treatments, technologies, or very rare procedures may not be available locally due to scale, resources, or the need for dedicated specialist teams.

Being referred abroad does not mean that a condition is untreatable or more severe than others; rather, it reflects the need for services that are concentrated in larger, more specialised centres.

These referrals are made to ensure patients receive the most appropriate and effective care available.



Patients may only access treatment abroad if they have been referred by their caring consultant working in a government public sector, and approved by the Treatment Abroad Committee.

Once approved, a staff member from the Treatment Abroad Unit will contact the patient to start the logistical arrangements and explain their entitlement and policies.

Contents

Understanding the Support System

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Ministry for Health ..	6
The Treatment Abroad Unit	7
Karl Vella Foundation	12
Beating Hearts Malta	15
The Malta Community Chest Fund	16
Puttinu Cares	17

Getting Ready to Go

Important documentation	18
Guidance when travelling abroad for treatment	19

Preparing to Return Back Home

Logistical Procedures	21
-----------------------------	----

Back Home

Guidance when returning from abroad	23
---	----

Words from families who went through the experience

.....	25
-------	----

List of Contacts	29
------------------------	----

Checklist	30
-----------------	----

Notes	32
-------------	----

Understanding the Support System

A message from the Chief Medical Officer

It is my pleasure to introduce this information pack, which serves as a valuable resource for patients and their families who may require specialised treatment abroad. Navigating medical care in another country can be a challenging experience, and this guide aims to provide clear information and reassurance throughout that journey.



The Ministry is committed to ensuring that patients have access to specialised treatment abroad whenever this is not available locally. The Treatment Abroad service enables eligible patients to receive expert care at internationally recognised centres, ensuring the best possible outcomes.

We recognise that serious illness affects not only patients but also their families. The Government therefore continues to support accompanying relatives where appropriate and works closely with charitable organisations that provide invaluable practical, financial, and emotional support throughout the treatment journey.

As Chief Medical Officer, I am proud of how the Treatment Abroad service has evolved over the years and of the comprehensive support now available to patients and their families. This progress reflects the strong collaboration between government entities, healthcare professionals, charitable organisations, and our international healthcare partners.

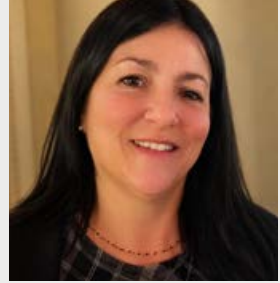
Looking ahead, the Government and the Ministry will continue to invest in the Treatment Abroad service, strengthening support for patients and their families, and ensuring continued access to timely, high-quality care abroad whenever it is needed.

Mr Clarence Pace

Chief Medical Officer

A message from Treatment Abroad Unit

As Head of the Unit, I am proud to form part of a team who works tirelessly to support patients receiving treatment overseas. Every patient and every family we meet carries a unique story, and we recognise the courage it takes to seek care away from home.



We understand that this journey can be emotionally and practically challenging, and our role is not only to coordinate logistics, but to offer reassurance, compassion, and a steady presence during uncertain times. My team and I are committed to walking alongside patients and their loved ones with empathy, respect, and genuine care, ensuring that each person feels heard, supported, and never alone.

We feel truly privileged and grateful to work in a service that is able to give something back to the community, and to support families during some of the most difficult moments of their lives. It is a responsibility we hold with great dedication, and one that continues to guide our work every day.

Ms Charlene Fenech

Head of Treatment Abroad Unit

The Treatment Abroad Unit - Mater Dei Hospital

The Treatment Abroad Offices can be found in three locations: at Mater Dei Hospital, 1st floor at the main entrance; in Swatar (Ex-HSBC Call Centre); and in Gozo at the General Hospital - Short Stay Level 1.

The Unit is responsible for the logistical arrangements of patients who require treatment overseas. Patients may be referred under different routes, that is, either under the long standing UK-Malta Bilateral Agreement or under the EU Regulations (S2 Route) or the Agreement with ISMETT (Palermo).

The services offered through this programme are considered as an extension to the services being offered locally. Cases referred overseas require specialised equipment and highly specialised interventions which can be offered in a very few centres overseas.

However the Office of the CMO is continuously exploring areas where to invest and to develop specialised treatment at Mater Dei in order to reduce the number of patients being referred overseas. This is aimed to reduce the burden and hardship families go through when having to leave Malta for treatment.

A patient can receive government-funded healthcare abroad if they are under the care of a Maltese Government consultant, have completed all possible local treatments and investigations, and are referred by their consultant for further care overseas.

Benefits for patients

The Department will cover expenses related to the patient and these include the air ticket, accommodation, transport, and food.

The medical costs related to the condition received under the NHS will be covered by the Department. No other medical expenses will be entertained.

Airline tickets

Patients in possession of a blue card will have one relative's flight ticket covered. When a patient is under 18 years of age, the Department also pays the tickets of parents or legal guardians. The Government has reviewed its travel assistance policy and agreed to start covering the airfare of one accompanying relative for patients aged 18 years and over. For further information, kindly contact the Treatment Abroad Unit.

Accommodation

The Treatment Abroad team can assist you in finding and booking suitable accommodation. For short stays, the Treatment Abroad Unit usually recommends Travelodge or Premier Inn hotels, as they are widely available in different countries with reasonable prices.

Please note that when booking, you will need to pay the full cost upfront (for example, by providing your Visa credit card details through [booking.com](https://www.booking.com) or similar websites). Reimbursement will be processed upon your return.

Reimbursement will be issued in accordance with the established and approved rates.

Food

The Department refunds the patient for meals when on out-patient care. An allowance as per established rates is provided to patients travelling abroad for treatment. Reimbursement is capped and will be processed upon the patient's return, subject to the applicable refund policy and presentation of original receipts.

Transport

Patients are expected to stay in accommodation situated within a maximum of 10 kilometres from the hospital.

Patients arranging their own accommodation must choose accommodation located between the airport and the treating

centre, or beyond the airport in the direction of the treating centre. Accommodation located in the opposite direction, away from the treating centre, will not be eligible for transport.

For example: Accommodation located 20 km from the airport in the direction of the treating centre is acceptable, whereas, accommodation located 10 km from the airport but in the opposite direction, away from the treating centre, is not acceptable.

For stays exceeding 10 days, transport assistance may be considered for accommodation located up to 32 kilometres from the hospital.

Patients need to make their own transport arrangements and submit original fiscal receipts for reimbursement, provided arrangements comply with the above stipulations.

Transport for relatives is not provided, except for post-delivery mothers, who are entitled for transport up to two weeks after childbirth. If complications arise, further transport may be considered based on medical needs.

The Treatment Abroad Unit will provide transport for up to three relatives of deceased patients to register the death and hand documentation and clothes to the undertaker. A taxi will also be provided for the airport.

Emergency Situations

In case of an emergency, take a taxi to the nearest A&E. If an ambulance is required, call 112 (the EU emergency services number). They will ask questions to assess the urgency and provide an ambulance if necessary.

After calling 112, also inform the office of the Treatment Abroad Unit and provide details about the emergency.

Telephone numbers on call at the Treatment Abroad Office:

Ms Michelina Borg – 00356 79708518

Ms Francesca Vella – 00356 79620994

Please do not use WhatsApp or messages to communicate.

IMPORTANT

Patients are expected to adhere to regulations and maintain a respectful and considerate attitude toward others. Unruly patients may be asked to vacate accommodation at short notice and the Department cannot take responsibility in such circumstances. If an appointment is missed without a valid reason, the rescheduled appointment may be delayed, and the patient will be required to cover any additional costs incurred as a result.

ALL REFUNDS WILL BE MADE UPON PRESENTATION OF RECEIPTS. NO REFUND CAN BE ISSUED WITHOUT RECEIPTS.

Patients on long stays (e.g. several months) may send receipts directly to the Treatment Abroad Unit by email, monthly, while still abroad.

Mental Health Support

KVF (Karl Vella Foundation) provides free psychotherapeutic support to patients and families facing illness or loss.

Through one of our services, **Because You Matter**, we support those needing medical treatment abroad and their families. We offer emotional support before departure, during treatment, and after return, recognising that the emotional journey spans far beyond hospital walls.



When You Might Need KVF's Support

- When breaking the news of treatment to children or family members.
- When a patient or carer is feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or isolated.
- When navigating grief, setbacks, or uncertainty about recovery.
- When returning home and struggling to readjust.

Services Offered

Because You Matter

This initiative provides free psycho-emotional support to patients, donors and caregivers travelling abroad for medical treatment. The support is also extended to family members who remain in Malta while the patient is abroad. Support takes the form of frequent phone calls and check-ins, individual/family therapy and crisis intervention provided by mental health professionals.

During the phone calls, the professional provides you with a safe space to process any thoughts and emotions. The professional checks in on your well-being, assesses your needs, assists you with any general queries, gives you space to process your experiences and supports you throughout your time abroad. Upon returning to Malta, KVF continues supporting you and your family to help readjust.

Embrace

If the patient needing treatment abroad is aged between 5 and 17, we provide free online psychotherapeutic and academic support. The sessions foster resilience, belonging, and skills to navigate challenging circumstances.

The Wellness Pod

Our years of experience working with children have highlighted how they are affected by having a close relative travelling abroad for treatment. Children may feel a mix of emotions, like anxiety, uncertainty, and fear, that they do not always display. We are here to support any child aged between 5 and 17 through free psychotherapeutic and academic support.

Life Beyond Loss

This service is held in collaboration with the Franciscan Conventual Friars and offers free grief therapy groups for those suffering the loss of a loved one.

In 2022, Beating Hearts Malta (BHM) celebrated its 10th anniversary. To mark this important milestone, we launched the Travel Support Scheme, aimed at providing financial assistance to children and adults who need to travel overseas for specialist cardiac surgery or interventions not available in Malta.

Through this scheme, BHM has allocated a dedicated fund to support eligible patients and their immediate family members when travelling to a recognised overseas specialist cardiac centre. Eligible applicants include patients of any age undergoing cardiac surgery, non-surgical cardiac interventions, or other cardiac procedures abroad. Each approved applicant will receive a fixed grant. As funds are limited, grants will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to availability and verification.

Applicants must contact Beating Hearts Malta after receiving confirmed travel details and documentation from the Treatment Abroad Office. The grant will be paid directly to the patient either before departure or upon arrival, depending on timing.

To apply, please use the following link:

beatingheartsmalta.org/travel-support-scheme/

Malta Community Chest Fund



www.mccff.org.mt

The Medical Assistance Unit at MCCFF assists by providing:

- Specialised medicine for severe chronic illness and cancer;
- Specialised treatment for rare diseases;
- Accommodation, transport and subsistence for patients receiving treatment abroad, and their accompanying relatives.

For more information, please call +356 2205 3500, or visit the MCCFF website.

When patients and their families need to travel abroad for medical treatment, Puttinu Cares offers additional support to complement the assistance provided by the Maltese Government. Their aim is to help make a difficult time a little easier for those going through it.

Originally established to support children with cancer and their families, Puttinu Cares has since expanded its services to include adult patients, continuing to provide practical support and care to those who need it.

For more information, please call +356 9967 2790 or visit the Puttinu Cares website

Getting Ready to Go

Important documentation (EHIC)

Patients are advised to ensure that their passport is valid for at least six months from the date of departure. This is essential to avoid travel disruptions, or issues with entry requirements when travelling abroad.

EHIC

servizz.gov.mt/en/Pages/Health-and-Community-Care/Health/Health-Policy/WEB012/default.aspx

It's important that both patient and those accompanying have a valid EHIC card with them. The European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) allows holders to access free or reduced-cost, medically necessary treatment in public healthcare facilities during a temporary stay in another European country, including the UK. It is intended for emergency or essential treatment that cannot wait until the patient returns home.

The EHIC helps simplify access to care and, where applicable, speeds up the reimbursement process. The card is free of charge and is designed to complement, not replace, private travel or medical insurance. (adapted from **servizz.gov.mt**).

S2

Your treatment overseas will be covered by a form called S2. This will be issued from the Treatment Abroad Unit to cover the period of your treatment.

This can only be issued once the date for treatment is known. Without the S2 your treatment will not be covered hence it is important to inform in advance the Treatment Abroad Unit about all your appointments, including face-to-face, telephone and video consultations. Please note that the S2 form must be issued before the appointment date and therefore, cannot be issued backdated.

If the Treatment Abroad Unit is not informed of an appointment in advance, the patient may be held personally responsible for any charges and receive the invoice directly.

IMPORTANT

It is important to note that in some countries there is a co-payment system, whereby patients are expected to pay a small fee as per the countries' system. This is not reimbursable and needs to be covered by the patient directly.

Guidance when Travelling Abroad for Treatment

Emotional & Mental Readiness

Preparing to travel for medical treatment often brings a wide range of emotions. Many people notice feelings of anticipation, concern, hope, and reflection as they step into this important journey. These emotional responses are a natural part of preparing for meaningful change.

Being away from familiar surroundings can invite thoughtful reflection about loved ones, daily routines, work, or school. Whether you are travelling or remaining in Malta, these moments often highlight how deeply connected we are to one another. Recognising these emotions with kindness and patience allows space for emotional balance and self-compassion.

Emotional shifts throughout this period are a normal part of adapting to change. Giving yourself permission to experience these feelings without judgment can support emotional wellbeing and resilience.

Bringing a few personal comfort items can help create a sense of familiarity and calm. Photographs, meaningful keepsakes, favorite clothing, music, or spiritual items can offer grounding and reassurance throughout your journey.

Practical & Logistical Readiness

Planning for travel, accommodation, and healthcare in a new environment often involves learning new routines and systems. Taking things step by step can help foster confidence and a sense of readiness.

Medical appointments and procedures may feel unfamiliar at first, but many patients find that care teams are attentive, supportive, and responsive to questions. Clear communication and guidance from healthcare professionals can help create clarity and reassurance.

Financial planning is also an important part of preparation. Seeking guidance, asking questions, and accessing available resources can support a sense of stability and confidence throughout the process.

It is also important to plan carefully for an adequate supply of medication, both for the patient and for any accompanying relatives, particularly in the case of longer stays abroad. Ensuring that enough medication is taken from Malta can help prevent unnecessary stress or interruptions to treatment. If medications do run out while abroad, patients are advised to coordinate with a trusted relative in Malta who has access to the necessary documentation, so that the medication can be collected from a local pharmacy on their behalf. The Treatment Abroad Unit should then be informed to assist with any further coordination or guidance required.

Preparing to Return Home

Step 1: Obtain Medical Clearance

If you had a follow-up appointment, consultation, or pre-operative assessment, you must obtain a medical report confirming that you are fit to return to Malta.

If you underwent a surgical procedure, the hospital must provide:

- A completed “Fit to Fly” form, signed by both the patient and the consultant.
- Your discharge summary and medical report.

Step 2: Collect Medication

Ensure that all prescribed medications are collected from the hospital or pharmacy prior to your departure. Kindly also ensure that any new prescribed medication is available in Malta.

Step 3: Contact Treatment Abroad Office for Return Flights

Once all medical documentation is in hand, contact the Treatment Abroad Office:

Ms Michelina Borg – 00356 79708518

Ms Francesca Vella – 00356 79620994

They will assist with booking return flights for both the patient and accompanying relatives.

The Treatment Abroad Unit is responsible for organising return flights for both the patient and any accompanying relatives. Where required, the Unit also arranges special travel provisions, such as medical staff accompaniment, stretchers, oxygen support, or other medical arrangements, to ensure the patient’s safe return. Expenses for additional luggage over and above the entitlement need to be paid by the patient.

In cases where a patient requires immediate hospital admission upon returning to Malta, the Treatment Abroad Unit coordinates the ambulance transfer from the airport to the hospital and arranges the hospital bed booking.

If follow-up appointments with the patient's consultant are required, the patient should inform the Treatment Abroad Unit, who will then liaise directly with the consultant to coordinate the necessary arrangements.

Bereavement Support and Repatriation

The Department oversees the repatriation of deceased individuals and will engage an undertaker to facilitate and coordinate these processes. Families have the right to opt for cremation.

All costs are covered by the Department. Any changes to the service in place need to be covered by the family.

Birth

When a baby is born abroad, the parents would need to register the birth. When the baby is given the go ahead to return and flights are booked, an appointment is made with the Malta High Commission so that they can prepare the Travel Document.

An application will be given to the parents before the appointment. ***Only one parent needs to go to the High Commission and would need to take the completed application form, 2 passport sized photos, a copy of the birth certificate and the passports of both parents.***

Back Home

Guidance When Returning from Abroad

Emotional Adjustment

Returning home after treatment is a meaningful transition that often brings a wide range of emotions. Many people experience moments of relief, gratitude, reflection, and hope as they settle back into familiar surroundings. Alongside this, it is natural to notice emotional shifts as you adjust to daily life again.

Reconnecting with routines, relationships, and responsibilities may take time. Allowing yourself space to adapt gradually can support emotional balance and wellbeing. Each person's pace of adjustment is unique, and honouring your own rhythm can foster a sense of stability and self-compassion.

Taking each day as it comes and gently reintroducing familiar activities can help rebuild confidence and emotional grounding.

Physical & Practical Recovery

Recovery often continues after returning home, and listening to your body's needs is an important part of healing. Prioritising rest, balanced activity, and regular follow-up care can support ongoing recovery for both patients and caregivers.

Coordinating care between overseas and local healthcare providers may involve learning new routines and processes. With guidance and support, many families find their way through this transition smoothly and confidently.

Planning time for rest and gradual reintegration into daily responsibilities can help create a sense of balance, strength, and continuity.

Relationships & Support

Returning to family life, work, school, and social connections is an important step in the journey. As you readjust, you may notice new perspectives, deeper appreciation, or shifts in priorities. These reflections are often part of personal growth and healing.

Maintaining open communication with trusted people can nurture connection and understanding. Gentle conversations, shared moments, and emotional openness help strengthen relationships during this phase of adjustment.

You may also find value in connecting with others who understand similar experiences. Mental health professionals and peer networks can offer insight, validation, and reassurance.

Being patient and kind with yourself is essential. Emotional adjustment unfolds gradually, and support remains available whenever you need it.

If it feels right for you, our emotional support professionals at KVF are here for you during this phase as well.

“You’re not necessarily under the clinical team any longer, but you’re not able to function normally at home as you perhaps once used to ... someone to help talk you through that ... guide you through that sort of phase that comes after treatment ... is really valuable.”

- Kate Middleton, Princess of Wales

Words From Families Who Went Through The Experience

Initial fear is normal

As you prepare for the journey ahead, you may notice a mix of emotions.

Moments of reflection, anticipation, and concern are all natural responses, and many people find reassurance as they gather information and support.

A strong support network awaits

Patients often find a new, supportive “family” among fellow patients, carers, and staff. Being open to socialising can make a big difference.

You are not alone

Many others are going through similar journeys. Talking to people around you can be deeply reassuring and comforting.

Trust the process

It can help not to fix a return date too early. Treatment journeys can change, and allowing things to unfold naturally can reduce stress.

Peer support matters

Meeting others undergoing treatment can be invaluable - they often understand your experience better than anyone else.

Create small daily positives

Simple ideas like a “hospital advent calendar” with small surprises can give children (and parents) something to look forward to each day.

Take care of yourself

Simple self-care - walking outdoors, spending time in parks, reading, enjoying a coffee or treat - can help maintain balance and wellbeing.

Let others help in practical ways

Friends and relatives often want to support - ask for useful items such as pyjamas, comfortable clothes, or small activity packs.

Entertainment helps pass the time

Books, TV series, and streaming services can be a helpful distraction and source of relaxation.

Maintain personal routines

Gentle exercise, skincare routines, and small daily habits can help parents and carers feel grounded and maintain a sense of normality.

Encouraging messages matter

Notebooks with notes and messages from friends can provide ongoing comfort and motivation during difficult days.

Stay organised

Keep a visible planner (for example on the fridge) with upcoming appointments to reduce stress and confusion.

Use local amenities

Supermarkets and shops are widely available for daily necessities, reducing the need to overpack.

Spiritual support

(if meaningful to you)

Find strength and hope through faith, prayer, quiet reflection, and spiritual guidance. stress.

Make use of hospital services

Children's hospitals often offer play therapy and psychological support, which families find extremely helpful.

Support for children

Bring favourite books, soft toys, board games, card games, or puzzles to help children feel comforted and occupied.

Logistics made easier

I would have worried much less about the logistics if I had known how organised and supportive the MDH treatment abroad office is.

Go cash-light

Contactless payment is widely accepted, so there is no need to carry large amounts of cash.

Value emotional support from home

Regular contact from loved ones and professional support services can be deeply reassuring while abroad.

Keep life as normal as possible

Being yourself and maintaining everyday routines can help both patients and families cope better.

List of Contacts

Beating Hearts

www.beatingheartsmalta.org

[+356 7946 8338](tel:+35679468338)

info@beatingheartsmalta.org

Karl Vella Foundation

kvf.org.mt

[+356 2123 7928](tel:+35621237928) / [+356 7704 1569](tel:+35677041569)

info@kvf.org.mt

becauseyoumatter@kvf.org.mt

Malta Community Chest Fund

www.mccff.org.mt/en/

[+356 2205 3500](tel:+35622053500)

mccf@gov.mt

Puttinu Cares

puttinucares.org

[+356 9967 2790](tel:+35699672790)

info@puttinucares.org

Treatment Abroad Unit

On-call numbers to use when abroad in EU countries:

Ms Michelina Borg – 00356 79708518

Ms Francesca Vella – 00356 79620994

Please call using the regular phone line and do not use WhatsApp or messages to communicate.

It is important to use these on-call numbers (and not office numbers).

Checklist



☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____
☐	_____

































Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]



Karl Vella
foundation

Here to Care

Kunvent Patrijiet
Fran ishani Konventwali,
Triq Burmarrad,
Burmarrad, SPB 9065

+356 2123 7928
info@kvf.org.mt

kvf.org.mt



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY
PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTRY
FOR HEALTH



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR SOCIAL POLICY
AND THE FAMILY



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR INCLUSION
AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR