

Having Surgery in the Public System



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ENT North

Many patients, even when they see a surgeon privately for their initial assessment and care, have their surgery in the public hospital system. The reasons behind these vary from one patient to another.

Most importantly:

The public hospital system in Australia provides world-class care at no individual cost. The quality of this care is the same as that in the private system. As a country, we should all be proud of this.

Advantages of the private system

- Quicker care.
- The ability to choose your surgeon.
- More flexibility around scheduling and (if needed) rescheduling your care around other commitments.
- Bed access and on-day cancellations are less likely to be an issue (but can still occur).
- Higher chance of a private room, wine with your meals, a nice view (but please note, these don't change the outcome of your operation...).

Disadvantages of the private system

- Some complex care is more appropriately done in public hospitals.
- Private care is often expensive, especially if you do not have health insurance.
- Costs can dramatically increase if there is a postoperative complication requiring a prolonged stay, or more intervention. This is particularly so if you do not have private insurance.

Advantages of the public system

- Easier access to 'multidisciplinary care': for complex cases, the public hospital system is, in many ways, better than private care. Some ENT patients need specialty nursing, speech therapy, dietetics care and other medical specialties. These are often more easily available in public hospitals.
- Onsite medical staff trained in the subspecialty of your care (in our case, Ear, Nose and Throat surgery).
- Onsite Emergency, Intensive Care, anaesthetic staff and other medical specialties, if something goes wrong (which can happen when you are having an operation).

Disadvantages of the public system

- You will wait longer for your surgery for non-life-threatening conditions.
- The surgeon you have seen in their private rooms has no ability to 'speed up' your care in the public system, nor intervene in decisions about timing or other aspects of your care.
- You cannot choose your surgeon. It will not usually be the surgeon you have seen privately.
- The hospital is less able to schedule your surgery around other life events.
- Cancellations due to lack of beds, time constraints etc are much more common. Your surgeon had no control over this.
- The 'décor' issues: there is less access to private rooms, fancy food etc. (but again, these don't change the outcome of your operation...).

What happens when I choose to be treated as a public patient?

- Your surgeon will fill in the necessary paperwork on your behalf to link you into the relevant public hospital ENT surgery department.
- You should receive a letter from the hospital within a month of this paperwork being received. If you do not receive this, please call the hospital involved and explain the situation to the Switchboard staff, who will then forward your call to the relevant department to confirm that the paperwork has been received.
- If they have not received the paperwork within six weeks of your appointment with us, please call our rooms to let us know. Your surgeon will chase down the issue for you.
- Once you have had your surgery, post-operative care will be provided in the hospital where you have had your surgery. ENT North is not able to provide post-operative care on behalf of your treating public hospital team.
- If you change your contact details between when you complete the consent form and when you have your surgery (e.g. move house, change your phone number), it is your responsibility to contact the hospital to update these. If they cannot contact you, you will be removed from the waiting list without having your treatment.
- Please note, our surgeons do not have the ability to shorten your waiting times for treatment unless your condition changes. If this is the case, you will need to get a new referral from your GP explaining the change and have another appointment with your surgeon to be reassessed. They may not be able to shorten your waiting time even if you do this.
- If you have been seen by a surgeon in the public hospital clinic and placed on the waiting list for surgery, you need to contact that clinic if you feel you need to have your waiting time shortened. Your ENT North surgeon cannot influence this decision.