

How Russia Cured My Appendicitis

By [Nathan Eyre](#)

November 17, 2013

The  **Moscow Times**

After reading the Nov. 8 comment in The Moscow Times by James Brooke titled "Why I Surrendered My Private Parts to Putincare," I thought I would share one of my own recent experiences with Russia's health care system. As a U.S. expat who has lived in Moscow for more than a decade, I can relate to much of what he described.

This summer, on a return flight from visiting my family in the U.S., I began to feel sick. This feeling only got worse on the taxi ride home in heavy traffic from Sheremetyevo Airport. At home, my wife and I decided to call an ambulance, which arrived within 20 minutes and took me to the nearest public hospital. With such short notice and having no idea how long I would need to stay, I quickly put together a bag of things I knew to bring with me: plate, bowl, spoon, mug, sugar and flip-flops.

Upon arrival, I was examined by a doctor, x-rayed and blood and urine samples were taken for analysis. The results came quickly. I was diagnosed with acute appendicitis and needed to be operated on immediately. Fortunately, the procedure was performed laparoscopically, which I learned is just a fancy way of saying minimally invasive. I convinced them I was well

enough to be released the next day, provided I stick to a liquid diet for my first few days in London.

The short time I spent there was a blur. The room where I stayed was simple and had six beds, a few of which were occupied by other patients. Other than a few curious looks and questions, I was not treated any differently because I was an American. I was able to follow game seven of the NBA finals with my iPhone.

Given the state I was in, I did not quite understand the nurse's instructions when she came to take me to the operating room. My seeming reluctance to get undressed and the look on my face as I clarified just how much clothes I needed to take off led to laughter among everyone in the room. Moving to the operating room was indeed like traveling forward in time. All of the equipment was new and modern. The doctors and nurses were very professional, and I got a call some time later asking about how I had recovered.

Hobbling down the hall to meals and to the restroom, where bringing your own toilet paper was necessary, was particularly painful until they were able to remove the drainage tube left in after the surgery. When the time came to walk down the hall to have it removed, it was slow going. Walking upright had become so unbearable that I frequently had to stop and rest in a sort of squatting position while leaning against the wall. I had made it halfway when finally one of the passing personnel noticed me in this state and offered to bring me the rest of the way in a wheelchair.

All of this cost me nothing. I have long held Russian tax residency, and I qualify for health care under the Russian national insurance program. Overall, I have been quite satisfied with the coverage. Later, when talking about this by phone with my mother in the U.S., she joked that many Americans would gladly bring their own toilet paper if it meant not getting stuck with a huge medical bill.

I have no solution to the Obamacare issue dividing the U.S. Both sides have valid points. I just hope that those directly involved in the process can come up with a system that is in the public's best interests. In the meantime, I'll be observing the Obamacare debate from a safe distance.

Nathan Eyre is a Moscow-based translator and teacher.

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Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/11/17/how-russia-cured-my-appendicitis-a29635>