

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

RF23-462

Request:

1. The amount written off by EKHUFT for NHS Health Tourism within its operational area and/or beyond, i.e. it sends patient to Kings for operation for the past five years.
2. The number of Health Tourists who received treatment in each of the last five financial years.

Requester's notes:

It is known that in a Staff Forum meeting that a Governor mentioned that £78M had to written off by the Trust. This sum was mentioned by a Non-Executive Director at an informal meeting.

The Trust is in a parlous financial state with a deficit of £80m. The loss of £78m to Health Tourist using our trust has in part created this parlous financial situation

Health tourism drains the NHS of **at least £300-400 million each year** because hospitals fail to identify overseas patients or never send them bills.

Health tourists are non-UK nationals who target the NHS because they will often get better treatment than at home - and for free, either by 'flying in and flying out' or through existing registration. By their very nature they are difficult to identify and quantify because they are likely to make efforts to conceal their true eligibility status or are not flagged up in the system.

Britain is among the worst countries in Europe at extracting payments from foreign patients and four in five hospitals do not expect to start recouping more money (see House of Commons Public Accounts Committee [report](#)).

Response:

We can confirm East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust (EKHUFT) does not hold the information you have requested.

We are unable to differentiate between 'health tourists' and overseas visitors. Please see below the number of 'overseas visitors' that EKHUFT has treated in the last five years. These are patients who have been invoiced personally or to insurance companies, or charged under the EHIC scheme.

Year	Number of Patients
2018/19	676
2019/20	660
2020/21	282
2021/22	236
2022/23	280
Total	2134

The Trust publishes figures relating to monies written off in relation to overseas visitors. Please refer to the Trust's Annual Reports for 2018/19 to 2021/22, which can be found on our website:



<https://www-archive.ekhft.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/about-us/documents-and-publications/annual-reports-and-business-plans/index.html>

We therefore rely on Section 21 of the FOI Act 2000 (information accessible by other means) in not providing these figures. Section 21 is an absolute exemption and is not therefore subject to the public interest test.

The Trust Annual Report and Accounts for 2022/23 will be published on our website before end of September. Therefore, the information is exempt under section 22(1) of the FOI Act, which states "Information is exempt information if (a) the information is held by the public authority with a view to its publication, by the authority or any other person, at some future date (whether determined or not).

(DATE OF RESPONSE: 16 AUGUST 2023)

