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'I Could Train Someone to Do It Within a Few Hours'

By SHIRLEY S. WANG

Surgically implanting explosives into the body is medically feasible and wouldn't require extensive training, according to medical experts.

Their assessment bolsters U.S. officials' concern that the strategy could be used by suicide bombers intent on blowing up an aircraft or other kinds of targets.

It is "absolutely conceivable" that explosives could be secreted in the body, said Malcolm Roth, president-elect of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. "It's certainly not a stretch to say that where there's a will, there's a way."

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Breast, pectoral or buttock implants, commonly filled with saline for cosmetic or reconstructive uses performed by plastic surgeons, could be filled with an explosive such as PETN instead, experts said. Implanting such a device under the skin could be

done with rudimentary medical training, said Elan Singer, a plastic surgeon in New York who has served as a military surgeon.

"I could train someone off the street with two arms and two legs to do it within a few hours," said Dr. Singer, who has some experience observing Israel's stringent security procedures.

A sharp pen-like object filled with a triggering chemical could be used to penetrate the skin and detonate the explosive, he said.

Implants are so common they likely wouldn't stand out to security personnel, medical experts said. Devices also could be implanted elsewhere, such as near the heart where pacemakers are placed. But in body cavities such as the rectum, where medical devices aren't typically deployed, they would likely raise suspicion during a security scan.

Implantations could be performed outside a medical facility and using local anesthesia, doctors said. Full recovery typically takes weeks but a recipient could theoretically be mobile within days. Medically, people should be able to walk around with explosive substances inside them for several weeks without consequence, according to Dr. Singer.

The volume of explosive substance that could be implanted this way has the potential to do damage. For example, a large breast implant commonly holds about 16 ounces, Dr. Singer said. Omar Farouk Abdulmatallab, who tried to bomb a jet as it landed on Christmas 2009, had less than 3 ounces of PETN in his underwear.

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