

Pursuing Health Abroad



“Customers’ number one concern is good quality of care and secondly that care delivered at a good price. To the extent the industry delivers on this value proposition will make for a successful industry”

40 million trips, or 4 per cent of global tourism volume by 2010.”

Yet one should be careful when taking these numbers for granted, some experts warn. Managing director, Fert Tours International Geneva, Jean-Marc Imhof thinks that “the demand for medical travel services requires specific handling.”

CEO, Wellness Travel, J.P. Bos claimed that “the market suffers from a number of problems, and the growth numbers are somewhat exaggerated.” Bos believes that the market decreased in 2009 and the longevity of facilitators in medical tourism is on average no longer than one to three years.

Another industry problem, especially in Asia, is that the hospitals “do not play a fair game,” according to Bos. “Unprofessionalism is yet another destructive force in the medical tourism sector, which results in the market not growing at the pace it could be”. Bos believes that the market in Asia alone could have been five times bigger.

In line with this argument, the 2008 Deloitte report on the medical tourism market was criticised by some members of industry, the main argument being that the number of potential medical travellers and predicted revenues were exaggerated. Critics of the estimates claim that industry participants are busy marketing the industry, not actually developing it.

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“The industry has matured and changed so much over the past few years. We have seen it develop from a fragmented and disjointed industry to extremely organised, much more educated, sophisticated and stronger”

Medical and wellness tourism is an industry that is currently generating interest from both public and private sectors. Increasing numbers of countries are benefiting from the industry, and as a consequence heavily investing in it.

So why has health tourism become so popular recently? The main reasons are people’s desire to save money and time on something so precious to every human being as health.

Being able to choose appropriate healthcare in and outside a country of residence is a liberating novelty for the population of patients who seek cost-effective and quickly accessible medical services.

Although a cheaper service seems to be the most attractive reason for medical tourism, saving a patient from 25 per cent up to almost

90 per cent of the usual domestic cost of a treatment, there are other reasons as to why people choose to travel abroad for medical care, such as advanced technology and better quality healthcare.

Much quoted yet not confirmed estimates about the industry indicate that the number of patients going abroad for medical care is steadily rising.

Estimates indicate that by 2012, the medical tourism industry is expected to reach \$100 billion. Reports indicate that in 2010, the number of medical tourists from the US alone will amount to 2.4 million. According to a 2006 analysis of the medical tourism industry, conducted by Tourism Research and Marketing (TRAM) “many countries are experiencing double-digit growth in medical tourism, which is forecast to grow to



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ise of safety and confidence regarding the highest standards of dental treatment," specified Szopa.

In the course of just one year, the clinic was awarded the international ISO certificate issued by TÜV Rheinland InterCert. The certification was a guarantee that the clinic offered the highest treatment standards in medical services and management. The ISO accreditation also proved that the clinic was operating in accordance with international standards.

"We are a modern ISO certified dental clinic, located in the centre of Krakow. We are a member of the Polish Chamber of Medical Tourism and have much experience in treating patients from abroad. We not only offer most modern treatments and state-of-the-art equipment, but, most importantly, experienced dentists which specialise in their particular narrow fields of dentistry. We offer all kinds of dental treatment: cosmetic treatment, prosthetic, surgical, endodontic treatments, implants, gum treatment, and treatment of children," said Szopa.

The motto of the clinic sums up the two main success factors of dental tourism in Poland: "Professional dental care for a reasonable price." The clinic's most popular treatments are porcelain crowns, implants, veneers and teeth whitening.

With a focus on patient care, the clinic developed a special dental practice system that involves a personal dentist who creates a treatment plan, followed by a team of dental care specialists who provide treatments under the supervision of the personal dentists. The clinic also offers one to ten year guarantees on various treatments, depending on their complexity.

In order to live up to its reputation of a high-quality and yet affordable dental clinic, Indexmedica offers a variety of introductory services for free. Thus the initial examination visit includes intraoral examination, plaster diagnostic models of teeth, a detailed treatment plan together with the cost estimation and time schedule, high-resolution digital X-Ray, and a free digital

package that includes an Indexmedica club card with discounts for treatments, accommodation and sightseeing in Krakow, a mobile phone to ensure 24-hour contact with the staff for the duration of stay, an emergency card with the contact details to a 24-hour English-speaking helpline, a toothbrush, toothpaste, mouth rinse, a map of Krakow, a catalogue of local trips for patients and their families, and booklets about dental treatments at the clinic.

Details matter to the general customer service policy of the clinic. Such things as punctuality of appointments and care of accompanying persons, especially children, are all attended to.

The clinic co-operates with other medical and wellness tourism providers in Poland, some of them being rehabilitation, spa and wellness centres, as well as general medical service providers.

"Thanks to numerous direct flight connections to Krakow, the trip to our clinic is extremely easy. Our main clients are from the UK, Ireland, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, Holland and the US. We think that Poland can compete with its competitors in Europe by offering outstanding quality of treatment for affordable prices," said Szopa.

"We think that this business is very promising. But clients are demanding and they motivate us to offer increasingly better customer service. There are more and more clinics that offer treatment for patients from abroad; however we think that in five years' time, only the best clinics with the highest standards of dental treatment and customer service will remain as important players in this market," concluded Szopa.

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The success factor

Indexmedica, a dental clinic based in Krakow, is focusing on medical tourism and now offers specific customer services for patients travelling from abroad

One of the most popular types of medical tourism in Poland is dentistry. People from around the world come to this central European country in order to receive reliable, modern and cost-effective dental care.

Indexmedica, based in Krakow, launched after Poland's European Union (EU) accession. "After Poland entered the EU in May 2004, it became easy for patients from abroad to come to Krakow and undergo dental treatment," said manager, Indexmedica, Jadwiga Szopa.

The independent clinic opened in 2007, and from the start it was clear that in order to be successful in the medical tourism market, the clinic needed to receive international accreditation.

"ISO accreditation gave our patients a prom-

3D reconstruction of jaws and teeth for patients who plan treatment with implants.

A comprehensive price list indicates the costs of all other treatments. Very often, the clinic makes special offers on the most popular or the latest dental treatments available.

All doctors at Indexmedica speak English, and in addition some speak German, Russian and Arabic. The qualifications of the medical staff match EU regulations, three of which possess PhD degrees in Medicine. In addition, there are a few foreign specialists that work at Indexmedica.

"We also offer excellent customer service, such as free taxi pick-up from the airport in Krakow, arranging of accommodation, as well as trips in and around Krakow," said Szopa.

The clinic also thought of a special welcome

“The motto of the clinic sums up the two main success factors of dental tourism in Poland: “Professional dental care for a reasonable price””

