

Health Tourism: Bulgaria in Need of a Business Model

Health tourism is a growing phenomenon in Europe. So what are the chances for Bulgaria? Health tourism experts from Kohl & Partner Hotel & Tourism Consulting and the Bulgarian Health Tourism Association met in Sofia in June to discuss systematic approaches for this exciting business sector.



Patient Mobility in the EU

According to a Gallup-survey, Eurobarometer (2007) on patient-mobility within the EU, 4% of the interviewed EU-citizens (EU27) had received a treatment in other European countries over the last twelve months (at the time of the survey). Slightly more than half of EU citizens are open to travelling to another EU country in order to seek medical treatment (average 54%).

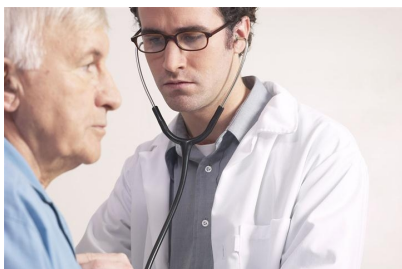
However, there were significant differences between the countries; not only geographical but also cultural distances played a major role. The most prominent reason to do so is a hypothesized unavailability of the necessary treatment in the domestic healthcare system. The hope of better quality through a specialist residing elsewhere in Europe and the promise of quicker access to necessary treatments are also an important motivating factor for patients.



Europeans are least likely to look for cheaper treatments when considering the options to obtain health services from another EU country. However, it plays a role for 48% of those who are open to travel for such a purpose.

To sum it up, quality is the major drive for health tourism to Western Europe and lower prices are a major argument to travel for treatment to Central and South Eastern Europe.

Prices for treatments in other CEE and SEE countries are partly even lower than in Bulgaria. A pre-condition for health tourism is also a good quality level of the medical treatments. So far, Bulgaria has a comparatively low number of international certified medical institutions. The overall healthcare system is in need for improvement to attract patients abroad.

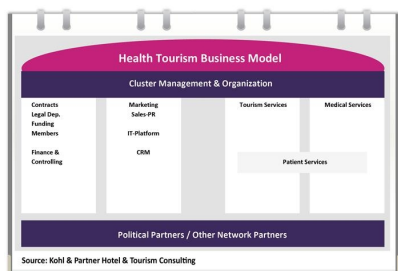


Dental, Elective Surgery, Gynecology for Health Tourists in Bulgaria?

A strategic approach to the medical tourism business in Bulgaria requires a focus on a limited number of facilities/regions and treatments. In the open discussion with Kohl & Partner it was stated by Dr. Stoev, president of the Bulgarian Health Tourism Association, that important stakeholders in Bulgaria see chances for health tourism in the fields of dental treatments, elective surgery and gynecology. Some high-standard facilities already exist in Bulgaria – like a Japanese run hospital in Sofia.

The Need for a Business Model

If country-, region- or company-clusters want to benefit from health tourism, a specialized business model must be developed. This model should determine the policies, the organizational structures, processes and the human and financial resources. It must precisely define the cooperation between the healthcare and tourism providers and the regional / national institutions. For example, how sales platforms can be processed and how the business is legally arranged. International co-operations have to be realized in order to exchange know-how, connections and to get access to European Funds.



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