

COLOMBIA MEDICAL TOURISM WENT UP BY 6.4% IN 2015



Colombia medical tourism slightly increased last year. 10,423 health tourists visited the country, indicating an increase of 6.4 percent from 9,792 in 2014, according to government tourism authorities and ProColombia, a foreign investment agency.

The health tourists visiting Colombia came mainly from Panama (625), Ecuador (628), Venezuela (860), USA (1,159) and the Netherlands (4,492). **ProColombia's estimate of 10,000 seems to be reasonable compared to the claims of various government agencies in the recent years that the number ranges from 20,000 to 50,000 a year.**

Though the figures indicated for the US and Latin American countries are believable, critics point out that it is difficult to believe that so many medical tourists from Netherlands visited Colombia because there were only a few Dutch visitors.

According to ProColombia, Colombia medical tourism industry offers attractive health services in areas such as assisted reproduction, urology, oncology, cardiology and physical rehabilitation. Colombian medical tourism also includes wellness services.

Over the last two decades, Colombia has been able to significantly improve its health care system. This led to an increase in life expectancy and a decline in infant mortality. A new review report by OECD shows that Colombians' access to health care has quadrupled from 23.5 percent of the citizens in 1993 to 96.6 percent in 2014.

As far as health insurance coverage among the poorest population (20 percent) is concerned, it increased from 4 percent to 89 percent over the last 20 years. In rural areas, it increased from 6.6 percent to 92.6 percent during the same period.

In addition to having increased access to health care services, Colombians also enjoy financial protection as far as health care spending is concerned. Out-of-pocket expenditure incurred by patients amounts to just 14 percent of the total health care spending, which is less compared to the OECD average of 19 percent.

In spite of the advancements in the health care sector, Colombia continues to face certain challenges and, therefore, needs to focus on improving efficiency, quality and sustainability. The OECD report's recommendation is that the country should work towards improving the accountability and performance of health insurers, hospitals, clinics and other health care service providers.

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