

HEALTH TOURISM IN ITALY HAS A POSITIVE OUTLOOK



Italian hospitals plan to benefit more from the growing health tourism in Italy. Each year, seven million people around the world take a trip for medical reasons, generating a turnover of 100 billion dollars. International observers estimate that Italy might reach a revenue of 4 billion euros.

Until now, tourists have been attracted by artistic and natural beauty of the country. **The authorities however plan to invest more and develop health tourism in Italy and benefit from the growing numbers of medical tourists.**

Recently, Italian hospitals have won the gold seal of quality in the European ranking of hospitals which is awarded by the prestigious Joint Commission International. This commission certifies adherence to 368 safety and standards and quality of care.

The health tourism boom was initiated by an agreement adopted two years ago by the EU. It allows citizens of 28 countries of the EU to receive treatment in all other countries of the Union.

The hunt for medical tourists has therefore already begun and the stakes are very high.

A study by Deloitte estimates that worldwide every year 7 million people take a trip for health reasons. A turnover of 100 billion dollars is generated annually which is expected to increase to 150 billion dollars in 2018. The revenues generated by medical tourism in Europe amount to about 12 billion euros. This data was provided by SDAB Bocconi OCSP.

Today, Italy represents 17% of the medical tourism share in Europe, amounting to 2 billion euros. According to international observers, this number could increase to 4 billion euros. Italian health tourism promoters are well aware that the country has a great potential. Recent surveys revealed that 53% of Europeans are ready to seek healthcare in other countries of the EU. Italy offers quality treatment especially in the field of neurology, cardiac surgery, oncology, bariatric surgery, and orthopedics.

Currently, the balance of health tourism in Italy is somewhat negative. Only 5,000 foreigners seek treatment in the country every year compared to 200,000 Italian patients who go abroad. Italians are not so patient to cross the Alps in need of a delicate surgery or cutting-edge treatment. It is because people are looking for lower prices of the treatment and other services.

According to a research, foreign patients in Italian hospitals are mainly Arabs, Swiss, Russians and Albanians. These spend between 20 and 70 thousand euros on treatments and interventions not including tourism expenses, because patients often stay at high-end hotels and enjoy art and nature, either alone or with their whole families.

“The phenomenon of health tourism in Italy is promising both in terms of global positioning of the country and in terms of support of public finances. Now it requires coordinated and targeted action to facilitate the growth of this system of innovative activities,” said general director of the General Hospital Bio-Medico Campus in Rome, Gianluca Oricchio.

He is one of the founders of the nonprofit network Hospitaly, sponsored by the Bio-Medico Campus. This network gathers health facilities and excellent tourism brands such as Alitalia, Italo, Hilton, Sheraton. The aim is to leverage on the strengths of the "Italian life style", namely art, culture and food.

The network involves hospitals ready to promote their services internationally, e.g. the Rizzoli in Bologna, the Niguarda Hospital in Milan and Health City of Turin. The strategy is more or less the same. To provide interpreters, medical records in the patient's language, nurses available even at night, but also shuttle services to and from the airport, rooms for relatives, agreements with major hotels, satellite TVs in rooms.

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