The Philippines to host Health Tourism Congress

Global market projected to grow by US$20 billion until 2012

Daniel Zimmermann

LEIPZIG, Germany: The Philippines has won the bid to host the next World Health Tourism Congress in Manila, the organiser Xura International has announced. The country will be the first outside Europe and the Asia Pacific region to host the event, which will be held at the Sofitel Philippine Plaza Manila on 26–28 March 2009. Previous congresses have been held in Germany, Cyprus, and Spain.

Hadi Malaeb, managing partner of the Dubai-based events company, told the Philippine Daily Inquirer that the Philippines won the bid for hosting the congress in 2009 partly because of an emerging trend in the Middle East to tour Southeast Asia, particularly the Philippines. He said that 92,000 medical tourists from the United Arab Emirates came to the Philippines last year, compared to 60,000 who went to Thailand.

Malaeb said that a 2006 Glinha study estimated the global health and wellness tourism industry at US$40 billion, which is projected to grow to US$80 billion by 2012. “The Asian market alone consists of 1.5 million medical tourists spending a daily average of US$562 compared with the US$144 of regular inbound visitors,” he added.

The tourism industry in the Philippines has been promoting the country as a health-care destination for the past few years. During a medical tourism and wellness summit in October, Tourism Secretary Joseph H. Durano emphasised the wellness sector as part of the Department of Tourism’s ‘recession-proof strategy’ to ensure tourism growth amid the economic downturn. Tourism Undersecretary Cynthia L. Carrion told reporters that the country has internationally recognised health-care facilities that compete with those in Thailand and Singapore.

Carrion also said that her department recently set up a technical working group for health and wellness tourism with representatives from both the public and private sectors. The department is also developing a statistical database to track the industry’s progress, and has negotiated tax incentives and a medical tourist visa from the Board of Investments.

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Tooth decay in Malaysia

A new oral health campaign by the Ministry of Health in Malaysia and international toothbrush manufacturer Oral-B has revealed that nine out of ten Malaysians have problems with their teeth and gums. Half of the population also visit their dentist only if there is a noticeable problem.

Units for Wagga Wagga

Planmeca reported that its distributor Henry Schein is outfitting the new Charles Sturt University dental school in Wagga Wagga, Australia, with a complete line of Planmeca products. The University is purchasing 82 simulation units, 76 Compact I dental units & 52 digital intraoral X-ray units.

Taiwan needs more implant training

According to an article in the Taipei Times, only 140 of 15,000 dentists in Taiwan are certified to place dental implants. An official of the Department of Health told the newspaper that although dentists in the country are allowed to perform the procedure, there is no effective quality control for the profession. Patients should check whether their dentists have received certification from professional groups before getting implants.

Globally, implantology is the fastest growing market segment in dentistry with a projected market volume of US$2 billion. Taiwanese consumers buy around 100,000 dental implants every year, figures of Taiwan’s Academy of Oral Implantology (AOI) say.

US military recruits foreign doctors

WASHINGTON, DC, USA: The US Department of Defense has announced the start of a recruiting campaign aimed at foreigners living in the United States on temporary visas, to fill critical shortages of medical personnel in the military. In recent years, the Army has had trouble recruiting medical professionals, not meeting its goals for applicants for medical and dental scholarships in exchange for military service.

The campaign, which has been under consideration for several years, allows the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force to recruit from the thousands of foreigners studying in the United States temporarily as legal aliens. Currently, there are about 29,000 non-citizens serving in the US military in return for expedited citizenship. Since 2001, nearly 57,000 foreigners have become citizens while serving in the military.