

Having Surgery in Brazil - Medical Tourism

Powerful Patient, 2010 Week 36

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Joyce speaks with Alex Lifshitz of Sphera International, one of the many companies specializing in "medical tourism." Medical travel has become a growing trend in the healthcare industry. Patients all over America choose to travel abroad for surgeries and procedures as an effective way to get safe low-cost/high-quality care. Already a hotspot for plastic surgery, Brazil is known for its beautiful tranquil beaches, fabulous shopping, and rich culture. Alex and Joyce will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of having surgery outside the United States.

About our guest

Alex Lifshitz is the CEO of Sphera International, a multi-national corporation offering worldwide consulting services in the area of healthcare management.

About Medical Tourism

Medical Tourism is the generic term for the practice of going out-of-country to seek medical care. The United States has for many years been a destination site for people from countries with lesser quality of medical care to seek treatment. However, with the costs of medical care in the United States rising steeply, and the quality of medical care rising in many countries, the balance is shifting rapidly. More than 600,000 Americans went outside the United States for medical care in 2009, and the total for 2010 is expected to be more than 1 million Americans going outside the U.S. for medical care.

Emergencies are of course best handled at home, and if the patient is in too poor shape to travel long distances, then medical tourism is probably not a good option. However, there are a number of procedures that can be planned months ahead of time. These "elective" procedures are possible, including:

- Joint replacements (knee, shoulder)
- Cosmetic surgery
- Bariatric surgery
- Dental procedures
- Reproductive procedures (IVF etc)
- Orthopedic procedures
- Rehabilitation medicine
- Transplantation of liver or kidney, if you can bring your own donor. Transplants are not available to foreigners in countries with ethical transplant lists.
- Non-critical heart procedures (by-pass, heart valves, etc.)

For employers and insurers, SPHERA offers viability and benefits studies for North American self insured companies considering a medical travel option for their employees. He is expanding their relationships

with insurance companies that work with self-insured corporations, to offer international treatment options to their employees.

Finding a competent physician with the skills and experience to do the job well is a challenge even in your own home town. When going to another country, the difficulty of finding the right physician is compounded. There are a number of countries vying for your business these days. The wrong way to do it is to fly to another country, look for a practitioner in the telephone book or the internet, and trust that you are dealing with an ethical practitioner and hospital.

Agencies such as Sphera International are springing up, designed to facilitate the process of finding the right practitioner, and designing a package that meets your needs.

A good place to start is the Medical Tourism Association: The Medical Tourism Association™ is the first international non-profit association made up of the top international hospitals, healthcare providers, medical travel facilitators, insurance companies, and other affiliated companies and members with the common goal of promoting the highest level of quality of healthcare to patients in a global environment. Our Association promotes the interests of its healthcare provider and medical tourism facilitator members. The Medical Tourism Association™ has three tenets: Transparency in Quality and Pricing, Communication and Education.

They maintain lists of accredited hospitals and clinics, and a list of agencies who are members of the Association.

<http://www.medicaltourismassociation.com/en/for-patients.html>

Once you have identified 2-3 agencies that serve the country you believe you want to travel to, here is a list of the things you should look for in the package of services they offer:

International accreditation of the hospital and physician

Reputation and success rate of the hospital and physician

Linguistic challenges (if any) and what services the agency may provide to overcome them.

Is travel included or not?

If special travel support services are required (e.g. oxygen on board) can the agency provide them?

What pre-flight interaction is there between your local doctors and the international medical team at the receiving hospital?

What pre-operative testing is required, and how many days prior to the surgery are recommended?

What post-surgical rehabilitation is suggested or required before you could expect to be medically released and approved to travel home?

If your recovery is delayed, are there additional charges for changed from the original planned return?

If physical therapy is required (example: following joint replacement) what is included in the package, and where will the therapy services be performed?

What support services are provided for your traveling companion?

What rehabilitation services are included, and what should be pre-arranged at home to continue your rehabilitation at home?

What if something goes wrong? Is there an insurance component to assure you that you will receive all necessary care until you are able to return home? What if you are unable to walk by yourself? What if you need to be lying down?

What communication will the agency provide to the home physician so that they can properly follow you once you are home?

For more information about Sphera International, please see <http://www.brazilmedicaltourism.com>, or send questions to info@brazilmedicaltourism.com. If the website comes up in Spanish or Portuguese, look for the US or British flags (upper right on the page) and click on the flag to get the appropriate language.