South Korea drives medical tourism with April conference

Daniel Zimmermann

HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany: In an effort to promote medical and dental tourism in Asia, the Medical Tourism Association (MTA) has announced its first Global Healthcare and Medical Tourism Conference, which will be held in Seoul in South Korea. The event, which has support of the government, is expected to draw over 1,000 experts from 25 countries to the capital of South Korea, including healthcare and insurance providers, travel agents and referring physicians.

According to the MTA, the conference is scheduled to take place in early April 2010.

South Korea is the latest country in Asia to encourage medical tourism. Last year, the Chung government passed legislation to allow hospitals for the first time to advertise for foreign patients. The country is hoping to follow nations like Thailand, India, Singapore and the Philippines, which currently have the largest share of patients in the regional medical tourism market.

South Korea, which saw some 50,000 foreigners visiting for treatment in 2009, aims to increase the number to 1 million patients by 2020. “Korea is one of the leading countries in the world where the government has made medical tourism a priority, enacted legislation and made other efforts to facilitate fast and stable growth of medical tourism in the country,” said Renée-Marie Stephano, Founder and Chief Operating Officer of the MTA.

She said that medical tourism in Asia will continue to grow because of low-cost, yet high quality medical procedures. “The level of health care there is excellent and advances at a fast rate equal to that around the world in the most advanced countries.”

She told Dental Tribune Asia Pacific that her organisation wishes to expand and hold other regional conferences around the world in the years to come.

Continuing education compulsory for all dentists in Malaysia

Daniel Zimmermann

HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany: Private dentists in Malaysia are soon required to participate in a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme in order to continue practising.

Through the scheme, which is an addition to the Malaysia Dental Act of 1971, those dentists will be able collect points by attending CPD seminars and participating in other CPD learning activities organised by the Malaysian Dental Association (MDA) in collaboration with the country’s Ministry of Health.

According to MDA president Dr Lee Soon Bonn, the new scheme was developed to further advance the quality and standard of dental care in Malaysia. Speaking at the 17th FDI/MDA Scientific Convention and Trade Exhibition in Petaling Jaya in January, he said CPD is essential for dental practitioners to maintain and improve their knowledge and skills throughout their working life.

“CPD has been compulsory for dentists in the civil service for the past five years and we believe that expanding the scheme to private dentists will greatly benefit the profession,” he said. Currently, more than 95 per cent of Malaysian dentists work in the private sector.

Although a specific guideline has not been officially announced, the new scheme could also recognise points collected in other parts of the region. Dr Lee told Dental Tribune Online. He added that his organisation has already established transnational cooperation with the Singapore Dental Association and has been invited to be an accredited CPD provider for Singaporean dentists and oral-health therapists.

Dr Lee also said that the FDI/MDA convention was the first MDA-organised CPD event to be accredited by the Singapore Dental Council and Ministry of Health.
Filipinos back-up improved implant education

Daniel Zimmermann

HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany: Dental implants in the Philippines are on the upswing, attendees at an implantology conference in the capital Manila have agreed. They also indicated their support of the plans of dental colleges and universities throughout the country to include implantology as part of their curriculum by 2011.

The conference, which was organised by the Philippine Academy of Implant Dentistry (PAID), drew almost 200 attendees to Manila. Owing to the demand, representatives of the organisation have announced that more seminars around the country will be arranged with an increased number of foreign speakers in order to advance the speciality further.

“The economic prospects are very good,” said Dr Carlos Buendia, President of PAID. “With the influx of dental implant companies offering affordable implant fixtures and dental laboratories catering to dental implant prosthesis, the overall cost for the dentist has gone down.”

In the last few years, more implant companies have entered the country, assisted by dental awareness programmes and dental tourism campaigns. The Philippines dental implant market, however, is still behind other markets in the region, like Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Australian patients are waiting too long

Claudia Salwiczek

HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany: According to a news report in the Australian newspaper Sunday Mail, patients in South Australia are waiting very long periods for dental treatment in the public health system. Of 26 adult community clinics, more than 50 per cent have waiting lists of longer than a year for basic treatment, the article states.

Amongst all clinics, the centre in Berri, a small town northeast of Adelaide, has the longest list, with two years’ waiting time for a dental check. Community clinics in Kadina, Naracoorte, Gawler, Salisbury Downs and Gilles Plains have 18-month waiting lists.

The President of the South Australia Branch of the Australian Dental Association (ADA) Dr Sharon Liberali told Sunday Mail that the waiting lists were “absolutely” too long. “People will wait between 12 and 18 months, but once they get in, they’ll get their routine care,” she said.

“But they have to go back on the waiting list for any further work and wait all over again.”

The ADA is opposing plans by the Rann government to address the problem with a new dental health-care scheme called Denticare. This US$3,37 billion scheme recommended by the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission aims to provide universal dental health care to all Australians. The ADA has released a counter-proposal that aims for a targeted scheme funded by a tax on sugar and soft drinks.

Minister for Health John Hill has defended the government, saying that waiting lists have been cut by half in the last 10 years. He expects the average wait to be down to 15 months by June, regardless of the implementation of Denticare.

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