

Travelling abroad for treatment



By **Leslie Morgan**
Managing Director Durbin PLC.
Leslie Morgan is a member of the
Royal Pharmaceutical Society of
Great Britain

I was chatting to my local newsagent the other day and he was telling me about his 'medical holiday' to India. Of course, 'medical tourism' has always been with us, but with it becoming increasingly popular in recent years I couldn't help but ponder on the reasons why people choose to go overseas for treatment or surgery.

There's no doubt that for those that can afford it, the higher quality of treatment that can sometimes be offered abroad has always been a driving force. Nowadays though it is not just the wealthy who are opting to travel overseas for medical treatment, and whilst the quality of care naturally remains key, other factors such as local availability of the required procedure, cost savings and reduced waiting times are also having an influence on the decision making process of some patients. Certainly in the case of the UK, the long waiting times experienced in some hospitals have been a motive for the increasing number of British patients who now look to be treated overseas, and the fact that treatment can sometimes also be combined with a

holiday can make it even more appealing.

Medical tourism has grown during the economic downturn as developed countries around the world have struggled to control healthcare costs and ensure medical procedures are available when needed. For many years, these countries would try to attract visitors from abroad, but now that trend is slowly reversing and there is certainly evidence that the Middle East is now actively seeking to attract medical travellers from Europe and the US.

I have visited the Middle East many times over the last decade and I have seen how the healthcare market has grown and been promoted to those overseas. The construction of Dubai's 'Healthcare City' which is home to two hospitals, ninety outpatient medical centres and 2,500 medical staff is a good example of this. Dubai, where Arabic and English is spoken, boasts a location which is now familiar to many Europeans and where they feel comfortable and safe. Many visitors from the UK choose Dubai due to its lower waiting times, high quality of medical facilities and internationally trained medical staff.

I've been told that the largest medical tourism hub in the Middle East is Jordan and that it is in the midst of a nationwide promotion to become a major competitor in this industry. So much so that a government office at the international airport helps incoming medical visitors by processing immigration documents more quickly and even provides a free shuttle service to hospitals. Over fifty hospitals in Jordan are involved in the push to treat overseas visitors, and the majority of these are currently approaching full capacity. Huge sums of money from private investors and government sectors are being invested in the expansion and further development of these existing facilities.

So what are the critical factors visitors

consider when choosing a destination for medical purposes? As already acknowledged, the quality of care (and the facilities where that care is offered) will always be at the top of most peoples lists. The Middle East has certainly provided a useful benchmark here to overseas visitors with the development of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) medical accreditation standards, and as has also been noted, there has been significant investment in new facilities across the region in the last decade. Other factors such as the perception of the destination including general safety then come into play. As visitors increasingly combine medical and leisure tourism so that they can bring their families along with them, this last factor should not be underestimated. Certainly with its rich cultural heritage and high quality resorts this is an area where the Middle East region has many obvious attractions.

The advantages of combining a trip are easy to see, and in the case of my newsagent, the opportunity to visit his family in the country where he was born. **MEH**

Durbin PLC is a British company based in South Harrow, London. Established in 1963, the company specialises in supplying quality assured pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and consumable supplies to healthcare professionals and aid agencies in over 180 countries. As well as reacting rapidly to emergency situations, Durbin PLC responds to healthcare supply needs from local project level to national scale programmes.
Web address: www.durbin.co.uk
Email: L.morgan@durbin.co.uk