

REPORT ON PROMOTION OF POLISH MEDICAL CENTERS IN THE UNITED STATES, NOVEMBER 2013: FAIR OF THE 6TH WORLD MEDICAL TOURISM CONGRESS, LAS VEGAS, AND A TRADE MISSION OF POLISH MEDICAL CENTERS TO NEW YORK

Magdalena Rutkowska

AMEDS Center, Grodzisk Mazowiecki, Poland

Corresponding author: Magdalena Rutkowska, AMEDS Center, Grodzisk Mazowiecki, Poland, e-mail: m.rutkowska@ameds.pl

Polish medical clinics participated in the 6th World Medical Tourism and Global Healthcare Congress, which took place in Las Vegas, Nevada, from 2–6 November 2013 (<http://www.medicaltourismcongress.com>). This year's event gathered over 2000 participants from 90 countries.

It was the second time that Poland had taken part in this trade fair, the largest of its kind in America. The centers that promote themselves at this international market belong to the Promotion Program of Polish Medical Tourism, set up by the Ministry of Economy in Poland to increase foreign trade. The internationally marketed program is implemented by a consortium of three companies: EUCP, AMEDS Center, and PAIiIZ. More information can be found on the official website of the project: www.polandmedicaltourism.com.

The consortium and partner centers shared a common stand and appeared under the common logo, "Poland: your health destination". During the fair there were a series of seminars and lectures on the medical tourism industry, presentations on the world's best practices, exchanges of experience, and matchmaking sessions. A keypoint was to establish direct contacts, i.e. networking. The participants could use a B2B platform, which allowed direct communication with other members of the congress. The Polish contingent was hosted by Mr John Petkus, Honorary Consul of Las Vegas and Ms Ewa Jonczyk-Ziomecka, Consul General of New York. Among the centers which distributed their promotional materials were the Medical Park Riverside & Spa rehabilitation center, the Ustron health resort and rehabilitation center, the Bocian (Stork) infertility clinic from Bialystok, the KCM clinic from Jelenia Gora, and the Wieliczka Salt Mine and Health Resort. Representatives of the World Hearing Center in Kajetany were also present.

Seminar sessions on the latest trends in medical tourism were worth special attention. It is estimated that the world medical tourism market has already exceeded \$100 billion and is growing steadily. In the United States alone there are over 37 million people who have no health insurance. In case of sickness or surgical indications, uninsured patients often opt for medical services outside the United States, as treatment prices in the USA exceed what they can afford. For example, cardiac bypass surgery in American medical centers costs \$90,000–\$130,000. Patients looking for

cheaper options can find them in Latin American, Asian, and European countries. By way of comparison, the same heart operation in Poland, including complete post-surgery cardiac rehabilitation, costs about \$15,000.

During the conference, Dr. McCarthy alerted delegates to the poor state of health care in the United States. He pointed out the large number of medical errors made by American doctors as well as to high rates of nosocomial (hospital acquired) infections. Medical errors are the third biggest cause of mortality in America. Numerically, only cardiac and oncological diseases exceed medical errors with about 210,000 deaths per year.

Poland received good attention from fair organisers and numerous medical tourism agents. Magdalena Rutkowska, a representative of the consortium and the President of Medical Travel Europe, was invited to participate in a forum on "Global medical facilitation".

Following the trade fair, the next step in promoting medical tourism to Poland was a trade mission to New York on 7 November aimed at medical tourism for the US market. Representatives of some centers, who were already present at the trade fair, travelled directly to New York to join others who travelled from Poland. The trade mission took place at the headquarters of the trade and investment promotion section of the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland.

The mission comprised six Polish companies belonging to the medical tourism promotion program: the Wieliczka Salt Mine and health resort, the Ustron health resort and rehabilitation center, the KCM Clinic, the Equilibrium Health Tourism Provider (a medical tourism agent), the American Heart of Poland cardiology clinic, and the Sport Medica (Carolina Medical Center) orthopedic clinic, as well as representatives of US companies in the field of health services, medical tourism services, employers, managers of large companies, representatives of Polish companies abroad, representatives of tour agencies and the wellness industry, governmental organisations, and suppliers of advanced medical technology.

The mission comprised a seminar by international experts in medical tourism, and outlined the main trends and

changes in this sector, with particular emphasis on the US market, the specific way this market functions, and potential areas of cooperation. Speakers presented objectives of the Polish project on promoting medical tourism, described why Poland is such a good country to come for medical and rehabilitation purposes, or for improving physical condition and appearance. In addition, representatives of American companies gained detailed information on Polish establishments belonging to the program and about potential international partners. After the seminar there was a matchmaking session for Polish centers and US businesses, during which concrete offers could be made, principles of cooperation established, or contracts signed. The event was attended by specialists responsible for sending

patients who need health care, or who were seeking new suppliers of medical tourism services for treatment abroad.

The trade mission was a meeting place for industry representatives from around the world, and was an ideal platform for establishing new networks and contacts. The event was organised by the industry consortium promoting medical tourism in collaboration with Ms Aneta Kuczevska, Vice Consul of the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in New York. During the trade mission, good press and audio-visual coverage, addressed to the Polish community in America, was produced in cooperation with the *Polonia Nowy Dziennik* newspaper and NDTV (www.dziennik.com).