

Large Hospital, Research Complex to Open in Northern Colombia This Year



Bogota, January 23 (RHC-EFE)-- The north-eastern Colombian province of Santander will soon boast one of Latin America's largest hospital and scientific research centers.

The International Hospital of Colombia complex will be inaugurated in November in the metropolitan area of Bucaramanga, the provincial capital, as part of an ambitious plan being carried out by the Colombian Cardiovascular Foundation, or FCV, ranked by the Joint Commission International as Latin America's fourth-leading hospital institution.

"The project includes 17 buildings and covers 350,000 sq. meters (86 acres)," FCV executive director Victor Raul Castillo told Colombia.inn, a news agency operated by Efe.

He said the initiative is the "largest private project in Latin America in terms of number of beds and importance," adding that it will comprise three new hospitals with 900 beds, in addition to 200 already installed, a medical and dental center with 450 doctor's offices, a university, and other spaces.

The complex also will feature a hotel, a convention center and apartment buildings to be built with additional private funding.

Castillo said the complex will have a heart institute and a cancer center, as well as orthopedic, traumatology, neuroscience, urology and nephrology units and a women's clinic, among other facilities.

"Our goal is to be competing for first place in Latin America within a decade," Castillo said of the plans of the FCV, which currently has one hospital in the Colombian city of Bucaramanga, as well as others in Santa Marta, Ibagu e and Manizales, and plans to extend that network to all of the country's 32 provinces.

Some \$250 million will be invested in the first phase of the Santander project, which includes the construction of the hospitals, parking lots and common areas, said Castillo, who estimates that an additional \$50 million will be needed to get the university and research and rehabilitation facilities up and running.

The initiative has the financial backing of the International Finance Corporation, an institution that encourages private sector development in developing countries and is a member of the World Bank Group, and the scientific support of the U.S.-based University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

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