

Newspaper Article Says U.S. Patients Could Travel to Cuba for Treatment if Restrictions Are Lifted



Orlando, February 18 (RHC)-- Thousands of U.S. citizens could soon begin traveling to Cuba for medical treatment if the U.S. government ends the blockade or allows travel to receive health care, said Anuja Agrawal, chief executive of the Orlando-based Health Flights Solutions.

In an article published by The New York Times on Tuesday, Agrawal — who runs a medical tourism company in Orlando, Florida — said that if U.S. patients travel to Cuba for affordable medical treatments, it could mean a big economic boost for the country's health system. “For them, they’re looking at it literally like winning the lottery.”

U.S. people can go to Cuba for a range of reasons, including family visits, academic conferences, public performances and religious and educational activities, but tourism or traveling to receive health care are still not allowed.

Cuba made health care a priority after its 1959 revolution and has earned a reputation for providing good, free care to the Cuban people. Thousands of Cuban doctors also work abroad, in Venezuela, Brazil and many other developing countries.

But for now, the most popular destinations for U.S. people who travel abroad for health care are Canada, the United Kingdom, Israel, Singapore and Costa Rica, according to a study by the Medical Tourism Association. It found that some of the most common procedures included spinal, weight-loss and cosmetic surgery, as well as cancer treatment.

Jonathan Edelheit, the chief executive of the Florida-based Medical Tourism Association, said some hospitals in the United States had expressed interest in forming partnerships with Cuban medical institutions, which could include the training of Cuban doctors. Such partnerships in other countries often go hand in hand with medical tourism, and that could eventually be the case in Cuba.

Unlike U.S. citizens, Canadians do not have travel restrictions, and Cuba is a popular vacation destination; many Canadians travel there for health care as well.

David McBain, 47, a Toronto landscaper who fractured his spine in a car accident, went to Cuba three times last year for extensive physical therapy.

“The physiotherapists and the doctors are extremely knowledgeable and well trained in Cuba, and you just can’t beat the price,” McBain said. “The price is a fraction of what it would be in Canada or the U.S. for a therapist.”

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