

Medical tourism in Russia: from myth to reality

Vladimir Smirnov / TASS

What tools are needed to create a brand of Russian medicine abroad, the portal "The Future of Russia. National Projects"

The volume of medical tourism should grow up to \$ 1 billion by 2024 due to the implementation of the national project "Health Care". How this direction is developing, whether foreign patients need visas, how the innovation will affect the provision of medical care to Russians, the correspondents of the portal "The Future of Russia. National Projects", operated by TASS news agency, found out.

Bringing Russian medical services to the international level means that the quality of assistance to Russians will improve, the head of the international department of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation Sergey Muravyov is convinced. Public project "The development of health services exports" is being implemented by 71 regions of the Russian Federation.

"The development of the export of medical services serves as a driver for the growth of the quality of medical care for the population of Russia, as well as the formation of a brand of domestic medicine in the international arena," Muravyov explained to the Future of Russia portal.

In order to interact with the regions, Export of Medical Services Coordination Center was created in 2019. It regulates the development and implementation of a system for monitoring the statistical data of medical institutions in terms of the provision of medical services to foreigners, and programs to increase the level of awareness of foreign citizens about medical services. In addition, the center is engaged in analysis of the structure of medical services export, development of measures to increase its volumes in our country.

The head of the center, Sabina Grin, called his main tasks the creation and maintenance of a monitoring system for information on treated foreign citizens and the amount of funds received, as well as advertising services of Russian clinics for

foreigners. As Grin explained to the portal, the tasks that are set in the public project “The development of health services exports” of the national project “Healthcare” can only be solved through interagency cooperation - with the participation of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, Rostourism, the Bank of Russia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Russian Export Center.

What are the reasons and where foreigners are treated?

According to the Russian Ministry of Health, already now foreign citizens go to the Russian Federation for medical care in such fields as cardiology, ophthalmology, dentistry, reproductive technologies, traumatology, orthopedics and neurology. According to Andrei Gaiderov, deputy director of the department of international cooperation and public relations at the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation, medical services in Russia are four to five times cheaper than in Europe and the United States.



Mikhail Tereshchenko / TASS

Foreign citizens traditionally go to Moscow and St. Petersburg for treatment. At the same time, according to Grin, the flow of foreign medical tourists to Novosibirsk and Yekaterinburg is growing, and the potential for the development of medical tourism is very big.

From what countries do foreign citizens are coming?

According to Grin, more than 60% of such tourists come to the Russian Federation from the CIS countries - including due to the territorial proximity to Russia. According to experts, the border regions will receive tourists from neighboring countries: they will come to Primorye from China and the DPRK, and to Poland and Lithuania to the Kaliningrad Region.

It also concludes agreements on cooperation in the field of medical tourism with some countries of the Russian Federation. As previously noted by the Director General of the Research Center of Radiology of the Ministry of Health of Russia, the chief oncologist of the Ministry of Health of Russia Andrei Kaprin in an interview with the portal "The Future of Russia. National Projects", such an agreement on cooperation in oncology was signed with Bulgaria. Kaprin also noted that the Czech Republic, Serbia and Croatia show interest in interacting with the Russian Federation.

How to solve visa problem?

There is no special medical visa for patients coming to Russia. Most often, according to Grin, foreigners use a regular tourist visa for the purpose of staying "targeted tourism", business visa for the purpose of staying "treatment" and private for the purpose of staying "special occasions" are also popular. The introduction of electronic visas in our country will help speed up their receipt, according to Grin.

Starting at October 1, citizens of 53 countries who wish to come to St. Petersburg and the Leningrad Region can already apply for a free electronic visa. The United States and Great Britain are not yet included in this list, but EU countries are included. The same opportunity exists in test mode in the Far East and in the Kaliningrad region.

The type of visa depends on the purpose of the stay of the foreign citizen. And the goal helps to determine the medical organization with which the patient must contact before processing documents. Existing visas also determine the length of stay of a patient in the Russian Federation. The visa issue, as well as the issue of migration registration of foreign patients, is currently being worked out jointly with the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Would the interest of Russian citizens suffer? Will foreigners be treated to the detriment of their own citizens?

The participants in the public project are convinced that solving the problem of increasing the volume of exported medical services will push Russian medical

institutions to improve service and technology, and this will positively affect the quality of medical services for Russians. There is no question of any infringement of the rights of the inhabitants of our country.



Head of the coordinating center of the federal project 'The development of health services export' of the Central Research Institute of Organization and Informatization of Health Sabina Green Vladimir Gerdo / TASS

Grin explained that the availability of medical care for Russians will not affect the development of medical services exports because the process of providing assistance to a foreign citizen requires a separate study of the patient's routing. This also means providing translation, escort and assistance to make the stay of a foreigner in the Russian Federation comfortable. In some cases, departments specially created in the medical institution will be engaged in this. If the clinic is preparing for the flow of admission of foreigners, it should calculate the possibility of admitting this flow, subject to 100% assistance to Russians. But the standards and clinical guidelines for the provision of medical care, according to Grin, will be the same for Russian and foreign citizens.

Will retraining of medical staff be required to work with foreigners?

Some universities are ready to work out programs of such additional professional education. Among them are Skolkovo, PFUR, HSE, Institute of Tourism. The concept of an educational program should be presented by medical

universities. "We understood that we need a short-term program that will allow us to keep things up to date and give certain skills to both the leadership of medical organizations and the nursing staff," Grin said.

Such initiatives are already being implemented. For example, Voronezh State University, with the support of the French Higher School of Tourism in Troyes, will begin training specialists in the Medical Tourism program of continuing education in 2020. Students will be taught by professors from the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Geography and the Faculty of International Relations of Voronezh State University, as well as teachers from the Troy Higher School of Tourism. The first set will be ten people, the training is designed for a year.

How can foreigners find out about the possibility of being treated in the Russian Federation?

For this purpose, the site russiamedtravel.ru was created, which collects all the information. On the site you can find the necessary information about the possibilities of Russian health care, what are the necessary documents for a foreign patient, what is the procedure for obtaining a visa.

For brand recognition of Russian medicine, according to Grin, tabs in foreign languages will be created on the sites of medical institutions. In addition, the Coordinating Center launches a special advertising campaign, which involves promotion through television channels, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube. The center also interacts with Russian carriers, airports and Russian Railways.



Виталий Невар/ТАСС

How will the services provided to foreigners be paid?

If a Russian organization with a compulsory medical insurance policy receives help in a medical organization, then the state will bear the costs. If a foreign citizen receives medical care, he pays himself. "When we are working with foreign citizens, we always talk about the provision of paid services. For medical organizations, this is an off-budget source of funding," Grin explained.

She noted that the issue of organizing services for foreign patients is still being solved at the expense of the medical institutions themselves.

"We hope to build a domestic health care brand on the market. We know what Israeli medicine, German medicine, Korean medicine are. But the Russian medicine is less impressed," Grin said. According to her, by 2021 there should be at least 828 thousand treated foreigners in the Russian Federation. By 2024, an influx of 1.2 million foreign patients must be achieved.