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## РЕГИОНАЛЬНЫЕ ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ И ЭТИЧЕСКИЕ РИСКИ МЕДИЦИНСКОГО ТУРИЗМА (НА ПРИМЕРЕ ВОЛГОГРАДСКОГО РЕГИОНА)

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**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается медицинский туризм как перспективное направление современного здравоохранения в рамках реализации федерального проекта «Развитие экспорта медицинских услуг», части национального проекта «Здоровье». Автор изучает возможности регионального здравоохранения в рамках реализации проекта «Развитие экспорта медицинских услуг Волгоградской области». Приведены данные о численности и географии приезжих, финансовых поступлениях в региональный бюджет за оказание платных медицинских услуг. Описаны риски регионального здравоохранения, тормозящие развитие медицинского туризма, и указаны способы их избежания. На современном этапе развития российского здравоохранения оказание услуг медицинского туризма законодательно не оформлено, поэтому больше внимания следует уделять этическому регулированию в данной сфере.

**Ключевые слова:** здоровье, пациент, лечащий врач, медицинская организация, медицинский туризм, региональная модель медицинского туризма, этические риски

Original article

## REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND ETHICAL RISKS OF MEDICAL TOURISM (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE VOLGOGRAD REGION)

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**Abstract.** The article examines medical tourism as a promising area of modern health care within the framework of the federal project "Development of the export of medical services", part of the national project "Health". The authors examine the possibilities of regional health care within the framework of the project "Development of medical services export in the Volgograd region". The data on the number and geography of visitors, financial revenues to the regional budget for the ensuring, paid medical services are presented. The risks of regional health care that hinder the development of medical tourism are described and the ways to avoid them are indicated. At the present stage of the development of Russian healthcare, the provision of medical tourism services is not legally formalized, so more attention should be paid to ethical regulation in this area.

**Keywords:** health, patient, attending physician, medical organization, medical tourism, regional model of medical tourism, ethical risks

Medical tourism, one of the most profitable types of modern tourism, which not only has a high growth rate, but is also a determining factor in the economic

development of a huge number of countries around the world. It is no coincidence that fifty countries of the world consider medical tourism as one of the goals

of national policy, contributing to a new concept of health care, according to which any person can turn to another country for high-quality and timely medical care, if he cannot receive it in places of permanent residence [1]. Moreover, for residents of those countries where medicine is less effective than in developed countries, medical tours abroad are a necessary measure. At the moment, a global market for medical services has already been formed with its own infrastructure (medical management, accrediting bodies, and medical tourism and tour operators). These actions have led to the fact that today, according to the International Medical Tourism Association, about 11 million tourists travel annually for medical care, and according to the International Health Research Center Medical Tourism Index, the commercial medical services sector will reach turnover of 3 trillion US dollars; at the moment this market is estimated at 439 billion US dollars [2].

Drawing attention to the prospects for promoting medical tourism in the Russian Federation, President V.V. Putin instructed the Government to quadruple the export of medical services by 2024, bringing the volume of this market to one billion US dollars. The instruction was given within the framework of the decree of the President of the Russian Federation "On national goals and strategic objectives of the development of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2024" dated May 7, 2018 No. 204 [3]. The project "Development of the export of medical services" being implemented today is part of the national project "Health" calculated for the period from 2019 to 2024. The project involves 70 regions of the country with all medical institutions.

Since 2019, in the Volgograd region, within the framework of the national project "Healthcare", the regional project "Development of the export of medical services in the Volgograd region" (hereinafter – the regional project) is being implemented, focused on the development of extra-budgetary activities of state medical organizations, increasing their competitiveness and increasing the volume of exports of medical services, both for foreign citizens and for citizens of the Russian Federation living in other regions of the country. 20 leading state medical organizations have been identified to participate in the project. They provide dental, cosmetic services, infertility treatment, routine procedures and complex specialized operations, such as replacement of large joints, cardiac surgery, laparoscopic operations, cancer treatment, and diagnostic examinations. The selection criteria were the material and technical base of the institutions, the availability of trained personnel, the availability of highly qualified doctors, a decent level of service, the introduction of advanced medical techniques and technologies.

In order to receive the necessary medical care 1170 foreign citizens visited the Volgograd region in 2019. 1271 visiting patients were provided medical assistance in 2020; 561 foreigners – in the first half of 2021, and 1450 visitors are planned to be provided medical assistance.

At the same time, the income from the provided paid services in 2019 amounted to 6.2 million rubles, in 2020 – 7.8 million rubles (data provided by the Volgograd Oblast Health Committee). Most often, our region is visited by citizens of Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, and Ukraine for treatment.

With an obvious increase in the number of visitors, we can talk about the problems that medical organizations face today when organizing work for attracting foreign patients to regional medical organizations. And in each of these problems, one can find the ethical risks of implementing a program to attract medical tourists. These problems include:

1. Low awareness of foreign citizens about the possibilities of receiving medical services on the territory of the Volgograd region. Here it is necessary to resolve the issue of who is the subject of such information, to exclude a conflict of interest and increase the personal responsibility of informants.

2. Absence of a simplified procedure for obtaining visas for foreign citizens entering the territory of the Russian Federation in order to receive medical services. In this matter, the ethical arrangement of the process of obtaining a visa can only be auxiliary; the problem must be solved in the legal field.

3. Absence of an internationally recognized system of internal quality control of medical care in medical organizations on the territory of the Russian Federation. In this regard, the ethical requirements for the quality of medical services should be more stringent, it would be good if ethical committees of medical organizations would monitor these processes. Unfortunately, their system has not been developed in our country yet.

4. Communication barriers between potential medical tourists and healthcare professionals (for example, lack of full-time translators, lack of translation of information pages of websites of Russian medical organizations). It is obvious that this is a violation of elementary ethical standards; therefore the slogan "We speak your language" should become valid in every medical organization.

5. Lack of professional liability insurance of a medical organization. The issue of professional liability insurance for medical workers has not yet been resolved; therefore, the harm caused to the patient through no fault of the doctor is compensated in different ways, long and unsatisfactory. It is possible to introduce as a mandatory item the insurance of its employees by a medical organization in the regulation on licensing it for the provision of medical tourism services

6. Lack of a system of interaction with foreign insurance companies. There are no ethical questions here, since the interaction itself is absent.

7. Low level of development of near-medical services due to the lack of interaction between the tourism sector and the health sector, as well as government regulation

in the field of medical services (assistant company). From an ethical point of view, tour operators and clinicians should stop tug-of-war on the question of who is in the lead organizer of medical tourism, but to solve issues together. But this requires a special advisory body, although issues can be resolved with the assistance of the Medical Tourism Association.

In order to eliminate these barriers and advance medical services outside the Volgograd region, the Volgograd Region Health Committee has developed a set of measures, including:

1. Introduction of a system for monitoring statistical data of medical organizations on the volume of medical services provided to foreign citizens, including in financial terms into medical organizations of the Volgograd region. Within the framework of this event, a system of monthly monitoring of the provision of medical services to foreign and nonresident citizens by the number, cost of medical services, the territory of residence of patients, the profile of the medical service provided was introduced.

2. Conducting marketing research on the tourist market of medical services. As part of this event, the institutions assessed the main countries of consumers of services, existing and potential, taking into account the transport accessibility of the region, the presence of their own export potential for the implementation of a certain type of service.

3. Carrying out an information and advertising campaign, participation in interregional and international exhibitions.

**Conclusions.** Firstly, medical tourism is becoming not only in demand in the social life of modern society, but also as a competitive type of economic activity of the state. However, today there is a need to use foreign experience in the development of medical tourism to create a national flexible system, critical reflection, analysis and adaptation of the information received and their introduction into everyday practice.

Secondly, in order to achieve the intended results, it is necessary not only to create an adequate ethical and legal basis for the development of the area under consideration, but also to improve the condition of medical and preventive institutions capable of accepting foreign patients. In addition, the need arose for sociological monitoring of the professional activities of doctors in order to develop measures aimed at developing the creativity of doctors, their motivation for new forms of medical activity.

Thirdly, it is necessary to establish work with patient reviews on the Internet in order to form the image of a medical institution and expand the client base.

Fourth, in the coming years, the actions of the authorities will be aimed at strengthening support for the initiatives put forward by state and commercial medical centers, which will create the conditions for establishing the export of medical services, and therefore strengthening the prestige and competitiveness of regional healthcare in the domestic market of medical services.

Fifth, medical tourism is a significant factor in the development of healthcare, moral, ethical and professional qualities of doctors and tour operators, a factor in the development of international communication. The development of regional medical tourism is possible subject to interdepartmental interaction of all stakeholders and the creation of regional ethical committees of medical organizations providing medical tourism services.

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