

Medical Tourism – Dental Care as a Perfect Example

Bulgarian Dentaprimе Clinic Offers Low Cost, Good Quality

Dental care, in particular implant work, is an out-of-pocket expense for patients in various European health systems. This is why dental clinics in Eastern Europe have been successful in attracting customers from, e.g., the UK – and from Germany, where public insurers pay fixed (smallish) rates.

Barriers these care givers need to overcome include the language as well as pre-conceptions regarding quality and post-intervention care. A clinic in Bulgaria has been particularly successful in this field of medical tourism.

“Costs we charge for implants are roughly 50% of those in Germany”, explains Dr. Regina Schindlajova, clinical director at the Dentaprimе Dental Clinic. The dentist

– who was born and received her academic education in the Russian city of Stavropol – heads a team of four, plus assistants and technicians. About 70% of patients come from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland; 15% arrive from the UK, and the remaining 15% include, in particular, patients from Ireland. Demand from the Benelux is still surprisingly low, according to the expert – “apparently, quality is not yet very high on the agenda there”.

Quality at Top of Agenda

Quality and competence are assets Dr. Schindlajova prides herself of – and for good reasons: She and her staff come from excellent educational backgrounds and keep themselves up-to-date on developments in the field; the equipment the clinic in Varna includes a volume CT for optimum 3D intervention planning; a lab is part of the operation, and hygiene conditions in the newly refurbished, modern building are comparable to the situation in good Western European clinics. The premises present a favourable combination of function with aesthetics. Key parameters have been approved by the technical inspection agency TÜV; and the

number of interventions carried out by the team – approx. 1,200 in 2007 – testifies to the necessary routine in dental work to keep up competence.

Cost Reduction Factors

Why are costs significantly lower in this Bulgarian clinic which opened in June 2006 and which is run by a Swiss private equity firm? “Whereas we use devices and consumables of the same make and quality as our Western European counterparts”, says Dr. Schindlajova, “our salaries are noticeably lower – even if, at our clinic, we pay somewhat higher-than-standard wages because we require premium qualifications and language skills.” Add to this the comparably low tax in the country – e.g., a 10% flat income tax, and lower ancillary costs.

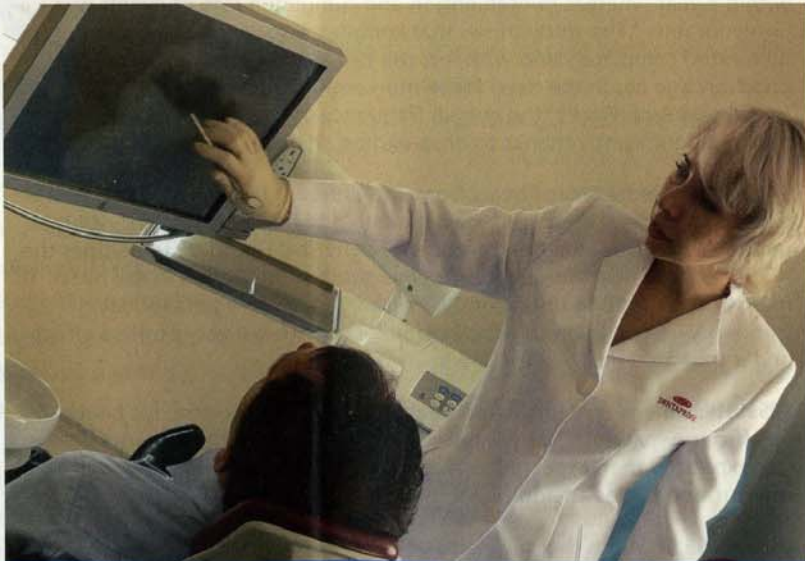
Typical Procedure

This is the typical approach, e.g. in Germany, of patients who wish to receive top treatment at bottom price: They get a treatment plan and cost projection from a local dentist and then ask for a quote from Bulgaria – today an EU member

country. This they take to their insurer for approval. They book an appointment with the clinic, and arrange for a holiday in the popular tourist regions of Varna or the “Golden Sands”. Avoiding the high season is recommended – spring and autumn are suited best; the cost for the flight and a one-week stay at a good hotel including full board is around €600. – Post-intervention care, check-ups, and evaluation of potential issues are carried out by Dentaprimе partner dentists in the patient’s home country. The warranty period maintained by the clinic is two years.

Insurers, comments the head dentist, tend to be very happy with this approach; even if they pay the same ratio for a given treatment, their customers pay less money for good work. “We had planned to spend our vacation in Bulgaria anyway”, explained a patient from Rastatt/Germany in the waiting area with its comfortable seats and pleasant paintings. “I appreciate, obviously, the cost savings for quality implant work – but also the acceleration of the project thanks to the presence of a lab.”

Michael Reiter



“Quality and competence – at half the price”: Patients from Western European countries come to Bulgaria for dental implants (Dr. Schindlajova, Dentaprimе Clinic, presenting a 3D CT to a German patient – Photo: MR)