

AMA Provides First Ever Guidance on Medical Tourism

2008-06-17

New AMA Principles Promote Patient Safety for Care Abroad

To ensure the safety of patients considering traveling abroad for medical care, new guiding principles on medical tourism were adopted today at the American Medical Association's (AMA) annual policy-making meeting. The nine principles are the first-of-its-kind, and outline steps for care abroad for consideration by patients, employers, insurers and third-parties responsible for coordinating travel outside of the U.S.

"Medical tourism is a small but growing trend among American patients, and it's unclear at this time whether the risks outweigh the benefits," said AMA Board Member J. James Rohack, M.D. "Since this is uncharted waters, it is our hope that the AMA's new guidance on medical tourism will benefit patients considering traveling abroad for health care."

In 2006, an estimated 150,000 Americans received health care overseas, and nearly half of the procedures were for medically necessary surgeries. The emergence of medical tourism is in part a response to the rising cost of health care in the U.S., which puts needed health care out of reach for many, particularly those without health care coverage.

"We need to address the cost of care in the U.S. and cover the uninsured so that every American who needs health care can get it right here at home," said Dr. Rohack. "Until there is significant action at home, patients with limited resources may turn elsewhere for care. It is important that U.S. patients have access to credible information and resources so that the care they receive abroad is safe and effective."

The new AMA principles call for all medical care outside of the U.S. to be voluntary. They address financial incentives, insurance coverage for care abroad and care coordination. The principles also call for patients to be made aware of their legal rights prior to travel and to have access to physician licensing and facility accreditation information prior to travel.

"For those patients considering medical tourism, the new AMA principles are an important starting point for consideration before making the decision to go abroad for health care," said Dr. Rohack.

To ensure that insurance companies and others that facilitate medical tourism adhere to the new principles, the AMA will introduce model legislation for consideration of state lawmakers.

Source: American Medical Association

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