

Increasing the Number of Foreigners through International Patient Center Services

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Objective: Medical tourism has become a hot topic among hospitals in Taiwan. However, Jen-Ai Hospital: Tali launched the first "International Patient Center" (IPC) in Taiwan, back in September 2003, to ensure access to medical care for the international community living in Taichung. From its humble beginnings by serving the expat communities in Taichung City & Taichung County, IPC has now grown to include serving foreigners living in Central Taiwan and the occasional tourists / visitors from abroad. This paper will share the experiences of Jen-Ai Hospital – Tali, in their efforts to increase the number of international patients in their hospital.

Materials and Methods: Jen-Ai Hospital IPC provides on-site interpretations in English and Japanese, free-of-charge; and medical interpretations in 20+ languages can be arranged through bilingual staffs and/or volunteers with 3 days advance notice. The IPC team consists of fluent native speakers who have genuine concern for the welfare of these international patients and is managed by a Program Director with a MBA degree in Health Care Management from the U.S. The team has provided superior care for these international patients; took part in numerous activities organized by various international organizations based in Taichung; implemented several successful projects that were the first in Taiwan / first in the world; etc. However, from looking at IPC's marketing analysis, the main reason for the increase in the number of international patients was due to good word-of-mouth from patients who have utilized Jen-Ai Hospital IPC services in the past.

Results: To date, Jen-Ai Hospital IPC has directly serviced over 6,500 patient visits from 1,600+ international patients. Of special interest is that these patients have come from 72 different nationalities, which makes Jen-Ai Hospital: Tali with the distinction of having the most number of international patients with different nationalities in Taiwan. And not only were these figures significant, IPC has won several local / international awards, plus several abstracts that were accepted to various international conferences / congresses around the world. IPC was honored to be awarded with the following awards, which include: “Excellent Bilingual Friendly Hospital” Award (from Department of Health in Taiwan); “Very Good English Environment” Award (from Executive Yuan in Taiwan); “Certificate of Recognition from Asian Hospital Management Awards in IT / E-commerce Category” (from Hospital Management Asia in Thailand); “HONcode” Website Certificate (from Health On the Net Foundation in Switzerland); etc.

Conclusion: IPC has proven successful in increasing the number of international patients in a local hospital in Taichung County, by providing superior services to these international patients, tourists, travelers, etc., who in turn recommends other foreigners to Jen-Ai Hospital IPC. International Patient Center services should be made available to all foreigners living in every major city in Taiwan, as the Medical Tourism project goes forward in the future. A good word-of-mouth is instrumental in increasing the number of international patients (especially the number of nationalities) for any local hospitals, who wants to do well in the Medical Tourism arena.