



THE AMERICAS: UNITED STATES

What is making news in your country when it comes to spa and wellness?

I found the article below when my company was preparing for implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA or Obamacare). We used this to understand all aspects of the ACA and how it would affect healthcare benefits to our staff, as well as how it may affect our guests. I feel that the ACA will continue to make news as the details are further defined; but more importantly, it may be a great catalyst for promoting a wellness lifestyle.

In the US the majority of the press on ACA is on the “individual mandate” provision, which will require almost everyone to have health insurance coverage. What has received less attention are the provisions for preventive care and potentially increasing access to health care providers who practice from a whole person, naturalistic perspective.

Prior to the passage of the ACA, workplace wellness programs had been required to comply with a number of state and federal requirements, including one that allowed employers to offer a financial incentive to employees for participating in a wellness program of up to 20 percent of the total annual cost (employer and employee) of the health plan. Gym membership discounts, smoking cessation and weight loss programs have been the most common offerings. Once the ACA is implemented that incentive will be increased to 30 percent for workplace programs. In addition, there will be further clarification of what type of intervention qualifies as a wellness program and the initiation of 10 pilot programs in the individual marketplace.

As described above, there has been some definitive progress made in insurance coverage for disease prevention under Obamacare. But how disease gets treated and by what type of health care practitioners are still issues that limit most Americans from access because of insurance coverage exclusions and limits.

The ACA will be providing a potential new opening for some types of holistic practitioners who have been struggling for decades to be included on equal footing with medical doctors (M.D.s) and doctors of osteopathy (D.O.s) for the delivery of primary care services. Section 2706 of the ACA, the “anti-discrimination” provision, will level this playing field. This provision states that insurance companies and group health plans cannot discriminate against any health care provider who is acting within the scope of that provider’s license or certification under applicable state law. One professional group that stands to benefit is doctors of naturopathic medicine (N.D.s). N.D.s are trained as primary care providers. They learn to treat all aspects of family health and wellness, from pediatrics to geriatrics. Their scope of practice may include everything from nutrition and botanical medicine to clinical diagnosis. In some states they are even licensed to prescribe the same drugs as M.D.s and D.O.s.

Naturopaths are currently licensed to practice in 16 states. Some states, such as Washington, Oregon and Vermont, already require that state-regulated health plans cover naturopaths in their networks for the treatment of conditions within the scope of the profession. This new provision has the potential to expand insurance coverage for naturopathic care in other states as well. Chiropractic doctors (D.C.s) and licensed acupuncturists (LAc)s have been included in some insurer network panels for years, but coverage, when offered, is usually for a limited number of visits or for minimal payments. This provision may enable more widespread coverage of these practitioners as well.

It’s too soon to tell exactly what these changes will look like, as there is often a gap between regulation and implementation -- and each state will define its own specific rules. But complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) and integrative healthcare are included in seven separate sections of the ACA. Those who have been promoting such changes are hopeful that the nearly 40 million Americans, according to the National Center for Complementary and

Alternative Medicine, who visit naturopaths, chiropractors, acupuncturists and other licensed CAM providers will soon experience some financial relief.

(Sherry Kahn, Wellness Coverage and Obamacare - http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sherry-kahn/obamacare_b_3292829.html)

What is happening in your country when it comes to wellness tourism and/or medical tourism?

Research has shown that wellness and medical tourism among Americans has sharply increased in recent years as people look for ways to curb the progressively rising costs of healthcare in the United States. There has been an increase in this kind of tourism to other countries, not only to find more economical care, but care that is currently not covered by their insurance companies. With the increase in wellness programs implemented by companies to lower health insurance rates, there has also been an increase in tourism within the United States.

Please give us one sentence to describe the latest developments in your country for each of these spa categories:

What is happening with hotel spas?

I believe hotel spas are trying to differentiate themselves where possible by offering treatments and services that are unique to their establishments, to attract guests comparing locations.

What is happening with destination spas?

With the increase in wellness tourism and with the spa experience becoming more mainstream in the USA, our greatest challenge has been how to balance the experience for those guests looking for a true spa experience verses those looking for a resort experience.

What is happening with hot springs spas?

As the quest for other forms of wellness experiences increases, more and more resorts and spas are being developed around hot springs to provide Balneotherapy and hydrotherapy treatments along with traditional spa treatments.

What has been the general attitude about investing in the spa/wellness arena in 2013?

I am fortunate that the owners of my property see that the future is in wellness (not necessarily spa) and have encouraged gaining as much knowledge and education as possible to expand our operations in the future. As a result of the discussions during last year's GSWS abut eliminating the word "spa" and embracing the term "wellness", we are focusing on how that change will be integrated into the culture of our property and our connection to our guests. We see that the political and structural issues of our healthcare system will not end anytime soon, and coupled with the fact the newer generations are living a healthier lifestyle; we feel our focus must be in expanding our presence in the wellness arena.

Looking back at the past four decades of spa and wellness, what would you consider "a defining moment?"

I can only comment on the current decade. However, in that short time I have witnessed the acceptance of the spa experience among American males. The spa experience is seen less as luxurious pampering and more as therapeutic, while a wellness lifestyle is becoming more mainstream among guests who are looking to nourish their mind, body and soul.

SUBMITTED BY:

Rick Duarte
General Manager/Dir. of Spa Operations & Development
608-253-9200
rdgm@sundaraspa.com