



Regional Entity Takes Bold Step toward Medical Tourism

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The Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council (TBRPC) is stepping out front and taking ownership for creating a roadmap to make the Tampa Bay region a premier medical tourist destination. The TBRPC which represents 4 counties, 24 municipalities, and 99% of the region’s population recently voted unanimously to take the lead on spearheading this regional economic development initiative.

The TBRPC will be contracting with an international consultant to conduct a feasibility study to determine the viability and strengths of the region as a medical tourism destination as well as determine the components that best position the Tampa Bay region to compete both nationally and internationally within the industry. *“Medical tourism is a worldwide, multibillion-dollar phenomenon that is expected to grow substantially,”* stated Commissioner Victor Crist, Chair of the regional planning council. *“The time is **now** to aggressively address medical tourism on a regional scale. The Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council has the support of its member governments and is positioned to move forward on creating medical tourism as an economic engine for the entire Tampa Bay area.”*

Medical Tourism is the term commonly used to describe people traveling outside their home country for medical treatment. Traditionally, international medical travel involved patients from less-developed countries traveling to a medical center in a developed country for treatment that was not available in their home country. As regions within the United States have developed specialties in medical procedures and wellness, medical tourism has become a domestic phenomenon as well. In a recent interview with WTSP 10 News, USF Health professional Dr. Rafael Carrion explained that Tampa has all the right tools to become a medical tourism destination. I believe Tampa has the full potential to develop into a major player in the medical tourism world," said Carrion. "When people travel here to get medical attention -- whether it's critical care or cosmetic -- it helps us locally." TBRPC Immediate Past Chair, Mayor Bob Minning of Treasure Island reiterated that, "Our hotel and hospitality industries could greatly benefit from medical tourism and we would certainly welcome the new clientele."

Manny Pumariega, Executive Director of the TBRPC reiterated the importance of approaching medical tourism from a regional perspective in order to create a unique market which will set Tampa Bay apart from other medical tourism destinations. "With the myriad of "top-notch" medical facilities located within the natural beauty of our geographic location, Tampa Bay is poised to become a premier destination for those seeking medical care which cannot be accessed in their own communities."

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