



# Philippines

# HEALTH & WELLNESS



A Guide to World-Class Healthcare & Travel Destinations in the Philippines

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## Pinoy homecoming

### Gifts of health and wellness in the Philippines

By **Joyce Socao-Alumno**



Christmas in the Philippines is the most anticipated event for many Filipinos living and working overseas; at no other season does everything of valuable and meaningful for Filipinos come together in one joyous package: family and friends, religious faith, and food! No wonder many balikbayans and those of Filipino descent come over to the homeland every December.



For a lot of balikbayans and other Filipinos from abroad, however, a Christmas vacation in the Philippines promises something more: the chance to experience health and wellness as possible only in the caring and competent hands of their fellow Filipinos.

For example, some balikbayans schedule a dental appointment beforehand, so that when they arrive in the country, they are able not only to visit relatives and take a relaxing vacation but also to get a brand new smile. Filipino dentists are renowned for their competence and careful, caring attention for the patients—and their services are at much lower cost than those offered in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and other countries in Asia. The best of them are experienced in treating patients from Australia, the U.S. and other countries.

The best Filipino dentists also use the best equipment, similar to that in other countries; they are also abreast with the latest, safest, and most effective procedures. Another advantage for balikbayans getting dental care in the Philippines is that there are many competent dentists available—even a walk-in consultation is possible, unlike in other countries where there are long waiting times for dental appointments.

Balikbayans and Filipinos from overseas can avail of more health and wellness opportunities in the Philippines—and below are some examples. (Note: when booking a medical procedure or a wellness treatment as part of your itinerary in the Philippines, ask the hospital, clinic, or spa/wellness center about the amount of time and other particulars required for recovery from the treatment/procedure, if any, and include these in your schedule and travel plans.)

#### Executive check-up

Doctors agree that an executive check-up is a very important tool in knowing the state of our health. It's a way of knowing what health risks we may have or even identifying actual illness that



has so far been undetected. In this way, we can make the proper lifestyle changes we need to prevent diseases or we can get treatment as soon as possible, should illness be discovered, and prevent a health condition from becoming more serious.

There are many executive check-up packages available at various hospitals in the Philippines. Depending on the package, an executive check-up could last from one day to three days—and may be done on an in-patient or outpatient basis.

Those who opt for an executive check up that require an overnight stay will be accommodated in the hospital's best rooms and enjoy a high level

of comfort and convenience.

Generally, the various tests conducted are designed to screen patients for three of the most common and most serious conditions in the world today: heart disease, stroke and cancer. Of course, the tests may also detect conditions that need attention because they could lead to the three conditions mentioned earlier, i.e. diabetes (might lead to stroke); obesity (might lead to heart disease); abnormalities, infection, or damage in certain organs (that may lead to cancer).

An executive check-up would include urinalysis, fecalysis, blood chemistry (including lipid profile, cholesterol; creatinine, etc.); CBC; and fasting blood sugar, among others. Imaging tests like X-ray and ultrasound would also be done; more advanced imaging procedures (CT scan; MRI) may also be conducted, depending on a patient's pre-existing condition or a patient's specific health concerns; and of course, on the package availed of. Tests for the cardiovascular system may include an ECG, 2D or 3D Echo, treadmill test, among others.

In general, the more comprehensive the executive check-up package availed of by a patient, the more specialized tests it would include. Also, remember that certain tests require advanced preparation before they can be conducted. For example, fasting blood sugar would require that a patient not ingest food or water for a required number of hours; or certain foods might have to be avoided before going through a fecalysis, i.e. foods colored red or brown, etc.

Expert specialists would be on-hand for a thorough consultation with the patient, including a cardiologist, pulmonologist, gastroenterologists, urologist, gynecologist, etc. Throughout the check-up, the patients would be under the care of Filipino nurses, who are known and sought-after all over the world for their caring, compassionate, friendly and cheerful bedside manner.

Before booking an executive check-up in any hospital, be sure to inquire about the tests included within a hospital's various executive check-up packages to see which one suits you most. You will also need to inform the hospital in advance regarding pre-existing illness, conditions, and other health concerns. Before coming to the hospital for an overnight stay/s, be sure to bring along any maintenance medicine you may have, and also inform nurses and doctors of any allergies and special conditions.

An executive check-up is a very good investment—after all, it's the kind of investment that will help you enjoy a better quality of life and more time with loved ones.

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#### Aesthetic procedures

The Philippines still has a way to go before it can become "the beauty capital of Asia"—but with so many expert dermatologists, plastic surgeons, internationally accredited hospitals, and specialty clinics offering beauty and aesthetic procedures, balikbayans and foreigners will be able to undergo safe, effective, and affordable aesthetic procedures in the country.

Affordability, convenience and quality go with having aesthetic procedures done in the Philippines. Since most of these procedures may be done on an outpatient basis, patients may schedule such procedures along with their other vacation activities.

The best dermatologic and aesthetic clinics in the Philippines are already experienced in treating foreigners. Some of these clinics are more renowned like the Belo Medical Group ([www.belomed.com](http://www.belomed.com)) and The Zen Institute ([www.zeninstitute.com](http://www.zeninstitute.com)) among others. Other ambulatory clinics have also started offering aesthetic procedures such as the MediCard Lifestyle Center.

It's important to remember this: no one can really say that a certain aesthetic procedure is just "minor". A nose-lift (rhinoplasty) may seem "minor" but having it done by an unqualified person can be a nightmare. So it's best to do a lot of research first before having any aesthetic procedure done. The best dermatology and aesthet-

ic clinics would have their own website—and a patient would do well to send an e-mail to any of these clinics and ask all the relevant questions before booking a treatment.

For balikbayans or foreigners with friends in the Philippines, they can ask their relatives and friends regarding a clinic's or hospital's reputation so they can make a more informed choice—whether for an aesthetic treatment or any other medical procedure. In short, do all relevant research possible before choosing a clinic.

Three of the Philippines' top hospitals like Makati Medical Center; The Medical City; and St. Luke's Medical Center are also offering aesthetic treatments. Generally, getting treatment at a hospital is more expensive than at a clinic—but the prices charged by these hospitals in the Philippines would still cost lower than those charged in many foreigners' home countries. These hospitals have detailed information about their treatments in their respective websites.

#### Spa and wellness

Two of the most reputable spa/health and wellness facilities in the Philippines are Nurture Spa in Tagaytay; and The Farm in San Benito in Lipa City, Batangas. These clinics offer a complete range of spa and wellness treatments, including massages, wraps, detox, cleansing, dietary and lifestyle consultation, and many more. Yet there are also other quality spas in the country that one can search through the Internet. These spas and wellness centers help their patrons achieve relaxation, relieve stress, cleanse mind and body, and learn a healthier lifestyle.

Balikbayans and tourists visiting the Philippines during the Christmas holidays can have an even merrier, more enjoyable

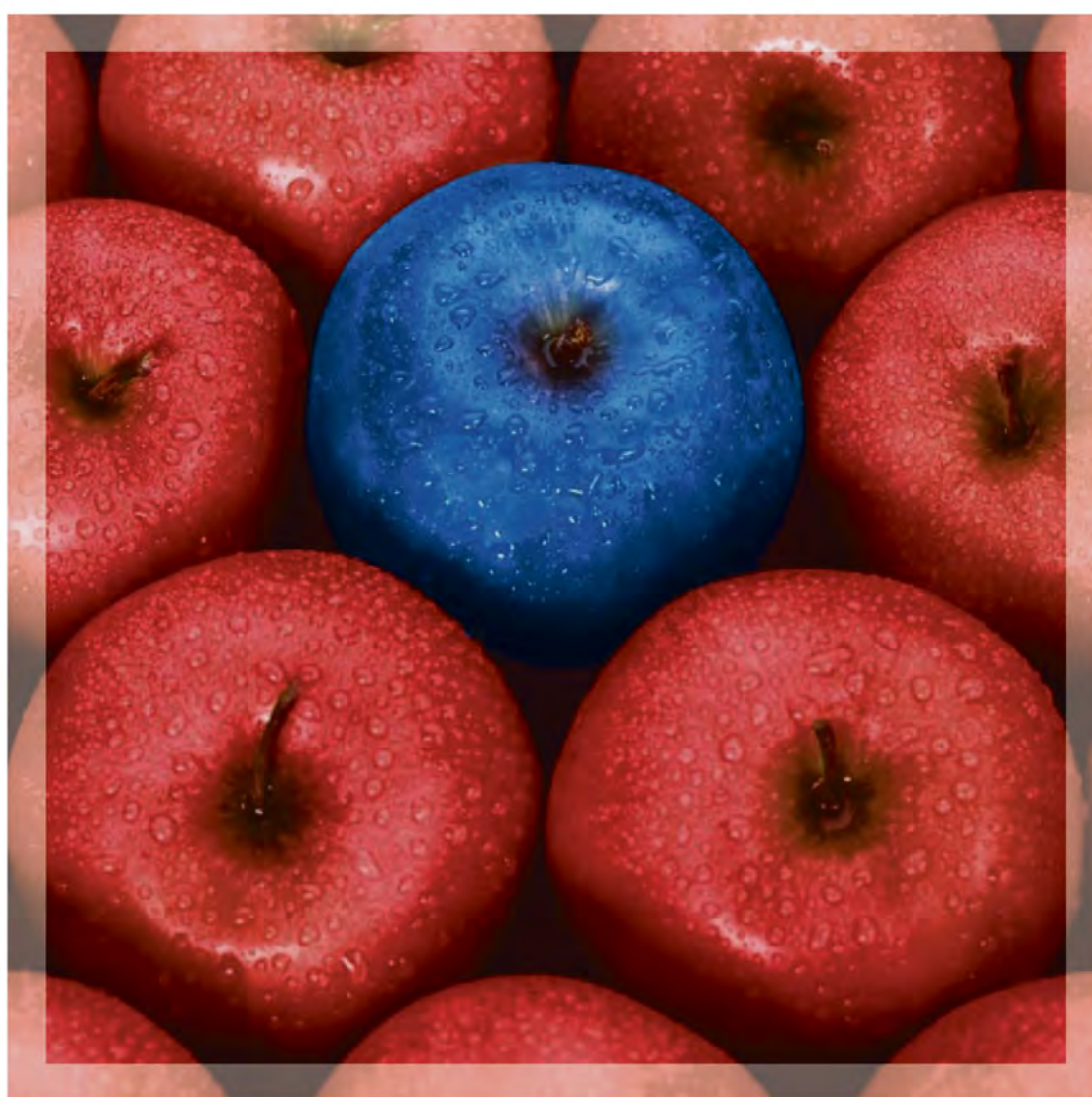
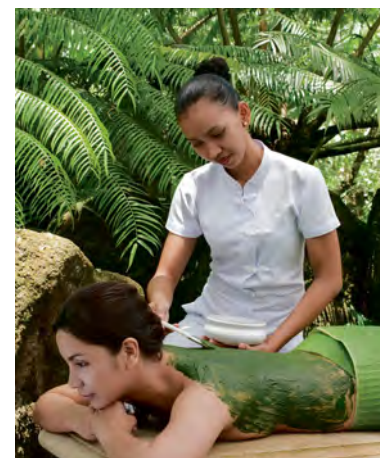


Christmas if they choose to include medical check-ups, aesthetic, or dental treatments in their itineraries: after all, isn't it great to have your vacation and/or reunion with loved ones and at the same time go home with a fabulous new smile; or looking more youthful; relieved of the effects of stress; and in better health?

Reputable travel agencies also have medical travel packages, so be sure to inquire about these when planning to avail of a health and wellness experience in the Philippines.

*(Disclaimer: Philippines Health and Wellness Travel makes no guarantees regarding the quality of the services provided by the aesthetic clinics and the spas/wellness centers mentioned above. Philippines Health and Wellness Travel has not received any payment or advertising fees from these clinics—but has mentioned them as reputable clinics as examples and for public information.)*

*The information contained in this article, as well as those in other articles in this section, is not meant to replace proper and competent advice from medical professionals. For any medical procedure, patients are advised to be diligent in their own research when choosing any hospital or clinic for treatment. - Ed.)*



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# Assuring Quality Patient Care



By Ramil Gulle

What do we really mean when we say something is “world-class”? The term has been used over and over again for so many things—from equipment to resorts to hotels—that its meaning has become vague.

Fortunately, when it comes to hospitals and other medical facilities there really are precise standards that they can follow—so that they can truly be certified as world-class. The global organization for setting these standards for hospitals is the International Society for Quality in Healthcare (ISQua) which is based in Dublin, Ireland. The process by which a hospital meets these standards is called accreditation.

While ISQua itself does not accredit hospitals, it is the one that accredits or certifies the various accreditors that do accredit hospitals. Who are these accreditors? There are several accreditors recognized by ISQua and some of them are already familiar to the Philippine hospital sector: NABH International; JCI (Joint Commission International); Accreditation Canada: ACHS (Australian Council on Healthcare Standards). Closer to home is the MSQH (Malaysian Society for Quality in Health).

These accrediting organizations are recognized and authorized by ISQua to certify hospitals and other medical facilities. Certification by an ISQua-accredited accreditor is proof that a hospital's quality of patient care and operations conforms to the worldwide standards set by ISQua. (ISQua is recognized by the World Health Organization as a partner in providing quality health care.)

## Accreditation and the Philippines

What does the process of accreditation mean for the Philippines? Some are of the opinion that accreditation is an aid in medical tourism: a hospital with international accreditation is certified as being able to provide real world-class patient care.

Understandably, foreign patients' main concern when it comes to traveling for health is the safety and effectiveness of the care they will receive from the country where they will be receiving treatment. The lower cost of medical care in the Philippines, for example, would be attractive to foreign patients but without an assurance of quality, foreigners would still shy away from the Philippines as a healthcare destination.

Therefore, medical travelers from overseas become confident that treatment at an accredited hospital by an ISQua-recognized agency will be safe and effective and would have international quality patient care this is equal to, if not better, than that in their home countries.

At present, there are already Philippine hospitals that are internationally accredited. The Makati Medical Center, St. Luke's Medical Center, The

Medical City, and Chong Hua Hospital are accredited by JCI. The Philippine Heart Center and Manila Doctors Hospital are both accredited by Accreditation Canada.

By 2013, it is expected that the Belo Medical Group will be accredited by NABH International—the first small health-care organization/ambulatory clinic to be granted international accreditation. It should be noted, by the way, that NABH International accredits not only hospitals but also wellness centers, spas, diagnostic clinics, imaging centers, blood banks, dental clinics, and other health facilities.

It is hoped that more hospitals and clinics will be following suit as hospital owners and administrators understand the value of accreditation.

## Benefits

What exactly are the benefits of accreditation? Some cynically think that accreditation is simply part of a hospital's marketing effort to attract medical tourists. However, according to ISQua Accreditation Council Vice-Chairman and Asian Society for Quality in Healthcare (ASQua) President, Dr. Bhupendra Rana, accreditation should mean more than this.

“Accreditation is not meant to be marketing. Rather, it is a way for hospital to upgrade the quality of their patient care and their operations so that its patients get the best care possible. That ought to be the main concern of any hospital seeking accreditation. Any other benefit to a hospital, like in terms of its business and profitability will come as a result of its commitment and effort to provide the best quality care for its patients,” he said.

Some of the benefits to patients would be improved quality of the diagnostic process as well as the day-to-day patient care they receive; an internationally accredited hospital would also be able to reduce its rate of hospital-borne infections; essentially, international accreditation would provide hospitals with benchmarks for upgrading equipment, improving the knowledge, training, and skills of its medical staff; and creating and implementing patient care protocols that reduce patient mortality, and result in more ideal clinical outcomes.

In some countries, internationally accredited hospitals are given certain incentives by the government if they are able to achieve and sustain their accredited status. For example, one incentive is the hospitals are given tax breaks or exemptions when purchasing medical equipment.

Furthermore, a hospital that is certified as conforming to international standards would be able to enjoy more profitability and greater savings.

That's because international standards also drive hospitals to be more efficient. This greater efficiency results in a much better management of re-



Philhealth president Dr. Eduardo Banzon

sources, effort, and time.

## Philhealth and PCAHO: Local accreditation

There are Philippine hospitals that are recognized by the Department of Health through Philhealth as Center for Excellence, Center for Quality, or Center for Safety. These are hospitals, both public and private, that are certified as meeting the Philhealth Benchmark of standards in patient care.

In an interview with Philhealth president, Dr. Eduardo Banzon, he said however that Philhealth may soon be devolving the task of accreditation to third party accreditors.

“If you think about it, Philhealth is really a purchaser of medical care services for its members. We talk to hospitals and ask them what services they are able to provide to Philhealth members. If they are offering treatments and services that our members can use, then great—Philhealth will draw up a contract with them.

“Of course, part of that contract is that the hospital or clinic must be providing quality, safe, and effective care. If not, then of course Philhealth will not be contracting them. Accreditation is part of the process by which we determine whether or not a hospital or clinic is actually providing quality care to patients,” said Dr. Banzon.

On the other hand, there are those who are still vague about the role of PCAHO (Philippine Council for the Accreditation of Hospitals) as an accreditor of hospitals. This was clarified by PCAHO President Dr. Tomas Maramba.

“PCAHO is focused on the accreditation of hospitals with regard to their fitness and capacity to provide for the special needs of medical tourists. What are these special needs? For example, does a hospital provide interpreters to its non-English-speaking foreign patients? We have patients, you know, who come from the Middle East and other countries where people are not so fluent in English,” he said.

Dr. Maramba further explained that other all aspects of care specific to medical tourists are considered when PCAHO processes a hospital for accreditation. This would include the quality of a hospital's rooms; whether or not a hospital provides services like a tour package to patients who are

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combining a visit to tourist spots along with their treatments, etc.

“In short, medical tourists would have special needs whenever they come to the Philippines. It is PCAHO that gives certification or accreditation to hospitals that are able to cater to these special needs of medical tourists. PCAHO does not focus on patient care. That is already taken care of by Philhealth through its benchmark of standards in awarding Center for Excellence status to hospitals,” Dr. Maramba explained.

Just like international accreditation, local accreditation of Philippine hospitals ought to result in improved quality of patient care.

## The future of patient care

Accreditation, it seems, is the way to go when it comes to improving our standards of healthcare. As Dr. Banzon noted, there is a quiet, slow, yet sustained increase in investments toward hospitals and other healthcare facilities.

“I'm not talking just about hospitals

that are acquired by new owners and upgraded. There are also new hospitals being constructed even in the provinces,” he said. Hopefully, this development in the healthcare sector will also result in more hospitals getting both local and international accreditation.”

HealthCORE, the center for global healthcare management and medical tourism research and communications, has been giving workshops to Philippine hospitals, clinics, and spas to help them learn the value of international accreditation (through ISQua accreditors) and the process of how to go about it. They are of the belief that the more Philippine hospitals get accreditation, it would be their patients, ultimately who will reap the benefits.



ISQua Accreditation Council Vice-Chairman and ASQua President Dr. BK Rana



PCAHO president Dr. Tomas Maramba

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## Insights on Accreditation: The Malaysia Experience

Dato' Dr. Jacob Thomas, is a medical doctor with extensive experience in hospital management and administration and is an expert in medical travel and tourism. Dato Thomas is a Councilor of the Malaysian Society for Quality in Health (MSQH) which is an accredited member of ISQua.

Dato Thomas is currently the President of the Association of Private Hospitals of Malaysia (APHM) and also a member of the Consultative Panel of Healthcare sector of the Malaysia Productivity Corporation (MPC). He is also a member of the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council. In 2012, he was appointed President of the Asian Hospital Federation.

Philippines Health and Wellness Travel had the privilege of interviewing Dr. Jacob Thomas in order to share with our readers his expertise. His answers reveal insights about his experience in medical travel in Malaysia, and have implications on how the Philippines can learn from Malaysia in developing its own medical travel program.

Philippines Health and Wellness Travel (PHWT): Please share with us briefly how the Malaysian Society for Quality and Health (MSQH) helps hospitals get accredited--what process does a hospital have to go through to be accredited by MSQH?

Dato Jacob Thomas (DJT): MSQH does an initial briefing, orientation and training for key staff Quality

Leaders of a hospital. This will allow them to efficiently perform a Self Assessment before the final MSQH audit. Separate training sessions can, if requested, be given to doctors, nurses, facility managers etc. This initial briefing is part of the Total Accreditation fee.

PHWT: There are hospital administrators/owners who don't seem to understand the value of accreditation. Did you have a similar challenge in Malaysia?

DJT: In Malaysia we had quite some resistance to going for Hospital Accreditation but this has somewhat lessened and is more acceptable now. We found champions from the various groups/peers, nurses, doctors and even some Department Heads; their input and leadership helped many to realize and understand the benefits of accreditation.

It was a slow process of making Owners and others realize the benefits of medical tourism. Much of the initial resistance has changed to belief and support when the benefits were understood.

HWT: Accreditation is really about improving a hospital's standards so that, ultimately, the patients are the ones that



DATO DR. JACOB THOMAS is the President of the Asian Hospital Federation (AHF), President of the Association of Private Hospitals of Malaysia (APHM) and a Councilor of the Malaysian Society for Quality in Health (MSQH), which is an accredited member of ISQua.

benefit. What are some of these benefits?

DJT: The benefits are mainly felt by the patients and this encourages them to seek treatment in accredited hospitals. Patient safety is improved. This includes patient safety in areas like medication safety; surgical safety; and the qualification, credentialing, and privileging of doctors.

The patient became the center of a hospital's focus; every staff became knowledgeable about and understood how and why things were done in a particular way; they knew that processes and procedures must be followed for the sake of the patient's health and safety.

Hospitals also benefit from accreditation. Overall hospital management and operations are improved. They become more efficient because everyone is informed about how to do things properly. There are policies set for all to understand the various processes.

Staff and doctors also know that they need to practice “safer care”. Insurance companies also refer their clients to these hospitals. This is a significant boost in revenue as more than 50% of patients in Malaysian private

hospitals have some form of health insurance. There have also been studies to show that Medico Legal cases are less in accredited hospitals.

PHWT: There are cynics who think that accreditation is a “marketing gimmick”. What are your thoughts on this?

DJT: Yes there are those who say it's about marketing. However, we must remember that when accreditation is achieved and its standards are implemented, patients are safer and are cared for better. We must also remember that hospital owners and CEOs must maintain and insist on the standards required and set by the accreditation—for the benefit of the patients. If they don't do that, then the accreditation process would be a waste and be just another paper certificate.

Doctors and their staff also discover that owning and maintaining the standards help prevent many of the pitfalls and legal issues in healthcare. Insurance companies also use accredited hospitals as their preferred healthcare provider.

PHWT: What incentives does the Malaysian government provide to Malaysian hospitals that get MSQH accreditation?

JT: The Malaysian Government gives Tax Rebates—to private hospitals—equal to the amount spent in achieving any approved international accreditation. This support and push by the Ministry of Health (that licenses and regulates health-

care) and the Minister himself, encourages hospital administrators to go for accreditation. Owners and hospital boards are also encouraged to push for it too. They don't want to be left out from the elite group of hospitals.

PHWT: What in your opinion are the health challenges that Malaysians and Filipinos have in common, and what do you think can these two countries do cooperatively to somehow resolve those challenges?

DJT: Both the Malaysian Government and the Philippine Government say that they are unable to sustain providing the current either free or heavily subsidized healthcare. There are discussions and plans being undertaken by the Malaysian MOH to look at ways in which a better yet affordable and accessible healthcare system can be introduced.

The Philippines is a step ahead and has introduced PhilHealth since some years now. There might have been some deficiencies and appropriate modifications have been put in place. I feel that the system is in place and the lessons learnt could be.

Valuable sharing is possible for both countries. No one model will be suitable for every country but they can be adopted with the necessary modifications to suit each one. Special focus needs to be given to caring for our aging population in all new healthcare plans.

## SEEING IS BELIEVING. BETTER VISION WITHOUT GLASSES OR DAYTIME CONTACTS.

This Christmas, you can give yourself or a loved one the gift of normal vision through a safe and effective eye-correction therapy known as Paragon Corneal Refractive Therapy or CRT. A person who is treated with CRT will be able to see normally without using conventional contact lenses, eye-glasses, and without laser eye surgery (also known as LASIK; there are two types of LASIK; one that uses a laser or one that uses a blade called a "microkeratome".)

"CRT uses special contact lenses to correct vision problems. These special contact lenses are different from regular contact lenses because they are worn at night while the person is sleeping. After wearing the contact lenses overnight, the person will remove them and his vision will be normal throughout the following day," said Dr. Carmen Abesamis-Dichoso, who is an Optometrist and Contact Lens Specialist. She is a licensed fitter of Paragon CRT and has been practicing it since 2007.

Paragon CRT is a brand of contact lenses used for a therapeutic procedure called "orthokeratology". Orthokeratology is a vision correction procedure that uses special gas-permeable contact lenses to reshape a person's cornea overnight. When the cornea is reshaped into its correct form, the person is able to see clearly without day time contacts and eyeglasses.

Dr. Carmen Abesamis-Dichoso is an Optometrist and Contact Lens Specialist. She is a licensed Paragon CRT fitter in the Philippines. She specializes in the fitting of contact lenses for keratoconus, color deficiency and high astigmatism. She is a recipient of the International Association of Contact Lens Educators Educator (IACLE) Fellowship Program in 1994 at the School of Optometry in University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. She has presented locally and internationally numerous lectures, papers and researches related to contact lenses, optometric education, amblyopia, and dry eyes. She also specializes in comprehensive vision examination for intellectually disabled individuals. She recently became a Fellow of the American Academy of Optometry, and is currently the Vice President of Philippine College of Optometrists.

So what makes Paragon CRT an ideal alternative to LASIK, regular contact lenses, and eye-glasses? Dr. Dichoso enumerated the benefits:

It's safe and effective. Clinical studies have proven the safety and effectiveness of Paragon CRT. This is why the procedure was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

"The contact lenses used in Paragon CRT are gas-permeable. This means that they allow the eyes to receive the right amount of oxygen," said Dr. Abesamis-Dichoso.

She added that the special contact lenses used in CRT, in fact, provide more than enough oxygen to the eyes. "For example, when we're sleeping our eyes need at least 87 percent oxygen saturation. When wearing CRT lenses, our eyes have 100 percent oxygen saturation while we're sleeping," she said.

Furthermore, Orthokeratology helps stabilize the grade of a person's eyes so it doesn't keep changing.

It's a good alternative to laser eye surgery. For those who have not heard of Paragon CRT, it will be quite a revelation to find out that it is a contact lens wear procedure that is an alternative to LASIK (Laser-Assisted in Situ Keratomileusis).

Dr. Abesamis-Dichoso said that not everyone is a good candidate for LASIK.

"A patient must undergo a thorough evaluation before laser eye surgery. For example, patients who are below 18 years old can't undergo laser eye surgery because their eyes are may still be growing. Patients who have certain eye diseases—like diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma—may not be good candidates either.

"Also, laser surgery is not for patients with unstable refractive values in their eyes—meaning, the grade of their eyes keeps on changing. If a person has these and other contra indicated conditions, they will not be given laser eye surgery," she explained.

A comprehensive vision examination should be done to anyone interested in the Ortho keratology procedure.

For example, Dr. Abesamis-Dichoso not only checks a patient's eye grade but also determines the shape of his or her cornea through an instrument called Corneal Topographer. Then she also checks if the patient has other conditions, like glaucoma, retinopathy, or dry eye. Dry eye is a very common condition nowadays and a thorough assessment through questionnaire, use of special dyes for the eyes, and examination of the tearfilm through Slit Lamp and estimating the height of the tearfilm.

"A patient who comes in for vision examination might have another condition in his or her eye that was previously undetected. If such conditions are discovered, then these conditions must also be addressed together with other vision problems.

Convenience. A patient who avails of Paragon CRT would only have to wear the special contact lenses at night while asleep—a minimum of six hours sleep is enough. While the patient is asleep, the Paragon CRT contact lenses would be molding the corneas to the correct shape. After waking up, the patient can then remove the special contact lenses and go through the whole day with normal vision.

"A person can do all normal activities without the inconvenience of wearing eye-glasses and contact lenses. Athletes also opt for Paragon CRT because it allows them to engage in sports activities with normal vision without worrying that they could damage or lose their eye-glasses or contact lenses," she said.

Patients may consult with Dr. ABESAMIS - DICHOSO, for Paragon CRT fitting or other eye concerns at her clinic in Suite 905 Medical Plaza Makati Amoroso cor. Dela Rosa Street, Legaspi Village Makati City. For appointments or inquiries, call telephone numbers (632) 813-3482; (632) 894-0625 or email service@abesamisyeclinic.com, carmen.dichoso@gmail.com.

### NABH INTERNATIONAL:

# Redefining healthcare delivery in the developing world

Initially developed and successfully implemented in India, NABH has gained recognition for its standards and as an organization by the International Society for Quality in Healthcare (ISQua) – the international body that grants approval to healthcare accrediting agencies – as a seal of excellence under its International Accreditation Program. With that, NABH has acquired a unique status: it has become one of the few accrediting organizations in the world to achieve this recognition. According to Dr. Sanjiv Malik, International Advisor on the Board of NABH and presently working as CEO of Aster chain of hospitals and medical centers in GCC and Senior Vice President in DM Healthcare LLC, "This is the first time that NABH, under the banner of NABH International, is taking its services outside India. We chose Philippines to be our first international venue because we believe that the Philippines faces similar healthcare challenges as India." In the first two years of NABH implementation, said Dr. Malik, the quality of healthcare delivery in India improved a lot. "It helped us become one of the leading providers of healthcare in the world. We would like to carry out the same mission in the Philippines," he said.

Launched under the aegis of NABH International's exclusive Philippine representative HealthCORE, the globally-recognized accreditation program has a wide vision: it seeks to improve the conditions, systems, processes and skills of healthcare facilities and professionals in the country through internationally recognized and accredited standards, NABH International will help in the training of consultants and assessors for the hospital, spas, clinics and other healthcare services providers in the Philippines. A tertiary hospital along with four small healthcare organizations, and a spa have been identified under the pilot project for accreditation.

Just very recently, NABH International expanded further its reach when the Dubai Health Authority recognized NABH International as an "approved accrediting agency for hospitals" in the United Arab Emirates. This makes NABH International one of the fastest growing accrediting bodies of ISQua since it started in 2008.

Dr. Girdhar Gyani, former CEO and now Advisor to NABH International underlined the fact that "all bodies, whose standard are accredited by ISQua, basically conform to common criteria as established by ISQua. Technically speaking, all bodies are expected to operate at the same level of competence. There can be difference in their organizational functioning. Some may be under government, some private and some being not-for-profit. The major difference between NABH International and other international accreditations is affordable cost. Dr. Gyani stressed the fact that since NABH International is a not-for-profit body, "By rule, it cannot charge more fees except what is needed for maintaining their operations," adding, "in no case would the services of NABH International be inferior to other international bodies, just because it has a lower cost.

"NABH International is primarily launched to facilitate and redefine quality healthcare delivery in the developing world", continued Dr. Malik. "No one – especially the poor patients – would be affected because of the expenses incurred by a hospital for accreditation process. The initial expenses put in for accreditation are largely to align the infrastructure and training. It was truly like making an investment for a good cause and once accreditation gets institutionalized, the wasteful process gets eliminated and the hospital actually begins to gain even in financial terms."

Dismissing any conflict between NABH International and PhilHealth (Philippine Health Insurance



DR. SANJIV MALIK, CEO of Aster chain of hospitals and medical centers and SVP of DM Healthcare LLC which is now the largest healthcare provider in GCC. Known as a guru in healthcare management and medical travel in the international community, Dr. Malik shares his thoughts in advancing quality, efficient and ethical healthcare delivery for patients worldwide.

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Corporation) or PCAHO (Philippine Council on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations), Dr. Malik mentioned, "NABH International being a not-for-profit body will not get into any unethical competition with other bodies." He said, "NABH International would extend the accreditation program to health providers conforming to global standards. It will have no conflict or competition with PhilHealth. As and when required NABH International will facilitate local capacity building within the local systems."

Accreditation by NABH International calls for assessing the competency of a hospital in terms of its infrastructure, biomedical equipment, manpower, systems, processes and clinical outcomes, with respect to the intended scope of services. Differentiating between ISO certification and the accreditation by NABH International, Dr. Gyani clarified, "ISO 9001 was a generic management system certification while the NABH International accreditation was specifically designed for healthcare providers and operated by experts from healthcare industry."

As the Philippines aspire to position itself as an international healthcare destination, its world-class doctors, nurses, and therapist need the same world-class operational framework to practice their profession. As Dr. Sanjiv Malik concludes, "Accreditation is a practical solution to one of the main issues in medical travel, which is quality and patient safety assurance. We cannot underestimate its importance since international accreditation allows our healthcare provider to convey strong message to patients that it has undergone rigorous external assessment which has been benchmarked globally. It builds credibility and confidence, and which finally, generates recognition among patients, both local and foreign alike."

### Q & A EXCERPTS FROM QCI PUBLICATION (VOL. IV, NO. 2)

Q: How will the NABH International accreditation benefit Philippines' local healthcare-providers and the medical field in general?

A: Accreditation provides assurance on patient safety and quality of care, which are two of the prime concerns for patients. India and the Philippines are both fast-developing nations and hence have similar challenges. An accreditation system was developed keeping these challenges in mind and, therefore, more suitable for the healthcare sector in the Philippines.

Q: Considering that the accreditation board originates in India, will there be a different approach when it comes to accreditation in the Philippines?

A: Primarily, the standard will be the same as that being used in India, since that is the one accredited by ISQua. However, our technical committee will look into regulatory and statutory requirements that are mandated by the Government of Philippines and make sure that before the grant of accreditation, the healthcare organization complies with all these requirements. If there are some cultural issues, these may get added into the standards for the Philippines.

Q: Given the economic crisis the country is currently facing, will local hospitals be ready to shell out funds for accreditation? Will this compromise on the standards?

A: At the outset, it may be noted that NABH International relies on credibility. In no way can it compromise on the standards, irrespective of the size of the hospital. NABH International, however, will be sensitive and try to see that accreditation fee should not be seen as burden by small hospitals. In fact, our experience so far tells us that by practicing accreditation for two-three year, hospital started to become more productive.

Q: Do you think that through NABH International accreditation, the Philippines will be ready to market its healthcare service to other countries?

A: It is more of a strategic asset and would need all marketing skills. In clinical terms, you basically need adequate resources to operate outside, backed by the assurance that resources are competent. Accreditation will provide that very competence.

Q: How did NABH International improve the healthcare-providers in India? Do you think the Philippines will respond similarly?

A: Quality needs drive. This can come from government, paying agencies and finally form empowered citizens. In India, hospitals are going for accreditation for a variety of reasons, i.e. (a) desire to excel; (b) attract medical tourism; (c) some paying agencies have made it mandatory that only accredited hospitals would be on their panel; and, (d) insurance companies are likely to link the payment with accreditation and finally empowered citizens have started asking for accreditation and they are choosing only accredited hospitals.

Q: How do you think Philippine government, particularly the Department of Health, welcome the introduction of another hospital accreditation body?

A: In India, we had the same apprehensions. We now realize that by virtue of the JCI operating, we get new inputs and shares the best practices on different platforms. In fact, when local bodies get a bit of competition, it should help them to be better prepared. Otherwise, there is all the chance that a local body becomes complacent. Lastly, NABH International, by virtue of its experience in operating in a country like India, which has a cultural similarity with the Philippines, will help the local body through sharing of technical expertise.

Q: Accreditation means having to upgrade hospital facilities and infrastructure to meet the standards. Do you think the Philippines government is willing to release funds for government hospitals, given that these are the ones that truly need an upgrade?

A: We have good experience about how to motivate government hospitals to upgrade the infrastructure. More than 200 hospitals are currently preparing in phases manner and that means budgeting also is needed in parts and that is generally possible for the government.

## What is Paragon CRT?

Paragon CRT is a specially designed contact lens used in corneal refractive therapy, or Ortho-Keratotomy (Ortho-K).

Okay. So what's corneal refractive therapy?

Corneal refractive therapy is a non-surgical process that reshapes the cornea of your eye while you sleep. You simply remove the lenses when you wake up and go the whole day without any other vision correction - like your glasses or contacts.



Dr. Carmen Abesamis-Dichoso. First certified CRT practitioner in the country

Is this new?

The idea of corneal reshaping is not a new one. But, Paragon CRT is the first contact lens proven to work and proven safe for overnight wear. That's why it's been approved by the FDA.

Is Paragon CRT permanent?

No. If you stop wearing the lenses, your vision will return to how it was.

How long does it take to start working?

Most patients see dramatic improvement in the first few days, with complete vision correction in one to two weeks.

Then, how do I see between the time I start using Paragon CRT and when it totally corrects my vision?

During the transitional period, you may wear Paragon CRT for part of the day. You may also wear other temporary contact lenses. This is a decision your eye doctor will make.

So I can see while wearing Paragon CRT?

Absolutely. You can see with the lenses on or off. So if you have to get up at night, no problem.

Are there any risks with Paragon CRT?

There is a risk involved when wearing any contact lens. It's important for you and your

parents to talk with your doctor about any potential problems like redness, irritation, or blurry vision, and what to do if they occur.

How often should I replace my Paragon CRT lenses?

Typically, your lenses will need to be replaced once a year. In addition, your doctor may have you come in at 6 months to make sure your eyes are healthy and your lenses are in good shape.

## Is Paragon CRT right for me?

Paragon CRT treats nearsightedness (myopia) with or without minor astigmatism. And because there are no age restrictions on Paragon CRT, it may make perfect sense for you. However, the ultimate decision needs to be made by you, your parents and your eye doctor.

Reach for that freedom. Consult with us today.