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**THE PROBLEMS IN STAFF QUALIFICATION IN BULGARIAN
MEDICAL- RESTORATION AND SPA TOURISM**

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Abstract: Bulgaria has 1600 thermal springs and only 100 are used for bathing and medical-restoration. In the last decade medical-restoration tourism has been turning not only in a market hit, but also in a socially significant necessity for Europe. In that market Bulgaria has its opportunities and they are closely related to the professional education of the medical and non-medical cadres. Medical tourism is gradually turning into a form of development of the services sphere referring to the health of healthy people (medical SPA).

Key words: medical-restoration and SPA tourism; European market; staff qualification.

Hippocrates, the Lather of medicine was the first to say “ nature cures illness ”Nature has been truly kind to Bulgaria. The medical and SPA culture has a history of 2000-3000 years in Bulgarian. Frescoes, mosaics and the remains of bath houses bear witness to the fact that the Romans had long ago discovered and enjoyed these springs.

Since 1 January, 2007 our country has become a part of new market medium for tourist services provided to Bulgarian and foreign citizens. In the last decade tourist industry has been acknowledged as the most dynamic economic sphere with annual turnover of hundreds billions dollars all over the world, including Europe.

In the wide range of tourist supply in Europe the special rehabilitation and SPA services, which use various combinations of natural methods and devices for prophylaxis, therapy and restoration, will be playing a more prominent part. Bulgaria is famous for its own tradition in the field of SPA services in its SPA resorts, as well as for its favorable climate, medicinal plants and ecologically clean foods.

Our country has made successful attempts to attract foreign citizens to the most popular Bulgarian SPA centers in the recent years. This is a market-justified trend, characterized by a lot of reserves for investors and establishment owners who offer demanded preventive, healing and restoration services to individual and group customers.

In the European market this type of tourist service has been subjected to a very serious competition. It is due to the fact that tourists from those purpose groups belong to the most

solvent audience, sustaining its interest throughout the year without any restrictions in terms of age, of professional or social characteristics, which are segmenting in accordance with the marketing criteria that are imposed in the business relationships of all the participants in that tourist sector.

Medical tourism is a hit again, although in Bulgaria that sphere of tourist business is unreasonably not appreciated properly, or is kept lagging behind. Medical tourism is becoming a tendency of present interest in attractive destinations, such as China, Russia, the Philipines, Thailand, and a number of countries in North Africa, the USA and Canada. Wellness programs should propose competitive package tourist services to the millions of citizens of Europe, the Balkans, and Russian speaking countries.

The world of tourist service is steadily developing on the basis of three main factors: nature, professionals, and demand. With clear and far-sighted national, regional, and local politics Bulgaria is capable of developing the medical tourism along with SPA and Wellness package services extremely successfully. All this will be possible if Bulgaria succeeds in constructing the activities of its specialized establishments on the basis of:

1. Natural resources and qualified medical and non-medical professionals;
2. Products and programs combining prophylaxis, treatment and rehabilitation of the psycho-physical health of customers;
3. Access to the market of countries, which are experiencing the lack of the available in Bulgaria healing mineral

waters along with sea, climate, herbs, foods and drinks from ecologically clean regions.

Medical-restoring tourism is impossible to achieve without a political will and normative changes for the reconstruction of Bulgarian balneo-medicine or SPA medical sector on one side, and the training of executive and managerial cadres on the other. This issue is of strategic importance for our balneo and SPA hotels – centers in the resorts with traditions in SPA and rehabilitation, for the abundance of natural factors, resources, and physical methods, which have been applied by a multitude of Bulgarian doctors for years.

The substantial accent at present is to improve the linguistic qualification and the professional skills of our medical cadres – doctors, rehabilitators, nurses, kinezitherapists, physiotherapists, and the employees, performing various procedures. The same holds true of the professionals involved in tourism, psychologists, caretakers, and attendants. That will be the most adequate qualitative change to the personnel in our establishments in reference to the staff's communication with foreign visitors.

Talking about this, Italy can be cited as a model. In Italy there are 15-16 types of employed specialists, working for a medium-sized SPA hotel (80-100 beds).

The new professional figures in Italy to day are:

- Thermal hotel reception tourist clerk
- Thermal mud man
- Balneology professional man in charge
- Thermal aerosol employee
- Wellness and a esthetic center employee
- Rehabilitative thermals employee
- Sweat cave employee
- Thermal pool employee
- Thermal vascular path employee

- Thermal hotel cooking employee
- Thermal hotel chef
- Thermal environment specialized promoter
- Seaweed thermal employee
- Thermal sanitary executive
- Thermal acceptance doctor
- Thermal administrative specialized employee
- Non conventional medicines specialized promoter

Those specialists occupy their working positions after a period of education of at least 6+2 years for doctors, 4+2 years for the other medical cadres, and 2 years of training accomplished in Higher Institutes and colleges, whose certificates are acknowledged throughout the world.

Thousands of Bulgarian medical and non medical/tourtical/ cadres really have the opportunity to get retrained on the basis of the new market trends in tourism, which is one of the most quickly developing industries in Europe. The chance for younger generations is greater if only they can appreciate the significance and the wealth of our national academic school. Besides, they should contribute to the restoration of the classical SPA medicine working as physicians, qualified in talaso-, aroma-, phyto-, hydro-, estetic and other therapies.

In the course of 3-5 years Bulgaria will be able to construct its own competitive "health and beauty" plants, which will enable thousands of working positions to be opened. As a result of this there will be a raise in the income and welfare of the employees working for that old-new branch. That will lead to a raise in the revenue of the local communities and regions too rich in natural resources, suitable for being cashed down because of the increased demand by our rich partners from the European Union.

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