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Domestic Medical Tourism Becoming Very Popular With Employers and Insurers, Says Health Options Worldwide

PRINCETON, NJ--(Marketwire - November 16, 2010) - Self-funded and fully insured employers are jumping on the [medical tourism](#) bandwagon, offering the option in their healthcare benefit packages. Medical tourism, or [medical travel](#), which used to be exclusive to uninsured consumers who would travel overseas for [low-cost surgeries](#) and medical care, is now growing in popularity with employers and insurers plan sponsors. "They see there are substantial cost savings and reduced employee downtime, so they want to be part of the growing trend," says David Goldstein, president of Health Options Worldwide, an [online medical tourism](#) agency that connects patients with physicians domestically and internationally.

With traditional medical tourism, patients would travel abroad for surgeries or other types of non-emergency medical treatment. However, the new push is for [domestic medical travel](#), whereby patients seek low-cost alternatives in other regions of the United States, or inbound medical travel, where international patients come to the US seeking quality care. "Medical tourism is not a new buzzword, but domestic medical travel is gaining momentum," explained Goldstein, "As the industry grows, employers are slowly adopting and offering the benefit."

The hot issue however is keeping patients in the United States as opposed to going overseas where the savings are substantially higher. In 2008, U.S. citizens traveled overseas to receive \$1 billion in health services. Goldstein believes that domestic medical travel's largest appeal is comfort and convenience. "It's easier, physically and emotionally, for someone to travel within the US and obtain follow-up care than it is for them to go abroad," he said.

Employers and insurers can offer enticing incentives to employees for using the domestic medical travel option. Cash bonuses, waived copayments, free companion travel can be offered in return for using an American-based doctor or facility. Healthcare plans can also offer lodging and meal expenses or passport and visa expenses and still reap a substantial amount in healthcare plan savings. "By encouraging domestic medical travel, employers can reduce employee downtime, improve employee retention and become more competitive in the marketplace," said Goldstein.

Several insurers like Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, WellPoint, Health Net of California, Blue Cross Blue Shield of South Carolina and UnitedHealth are adding domestic medical tourism options or launching pilot programs to test effectiveness. "This is a big deal because these insurers, such as Blue Cross Blue Shield, have always been conservative," said Goldstein, "So to see these giants join the trend signifies that we are the cusp of something big in the healthcare market. The price differences are so substantial, it's a no-brainer."