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Korea to nurture its medical tourism industry

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Singapore: According to the nation's top health official, the Korean government is keen to promote its medical tourism industry and aims to multiply the current number of medical tourists to 1 million by 2020.

The nation's health and welfare minister Mr Moon Hyung-pyo said that the number of medical tourists is expected to reach 250,000 this year.

Mr Hyung-pyo added that Middle Eastern countries, due to their poor health infrastructure offered huge opportunities to Korea. "About 120,000 people from the UAE and 200,000 from Saudi Arabia visit other countries annually to get medical treatment," he added.

Revenue from medical tourism jumped to $368 million last year with 211,218 tourists opting medical services in Korea. He said that cosmetic surgery only accounted for 8.6 percent or 24,075 out of a total of 211,218 medical tourists, while internal medicine accounted for 68,453 cases or 24.4 percent,followed by 28,135 medical examinations and 25,101 for dermatological help.

"The portion of foreigners visiting the country to get plastic surgery is expected to decrease as Korean hospitals are diversifying their services in response to rising demand from foreign patients," said Mr Hyung-pyo.

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He further added that Korea offered best services at cheaper costs, which attracted many overseas customers. Korea also seeks to improve cooperation with other countries and relax certain regulations that can boost the medical tourism industry.

The ministry will also help the industry by conducting specialized courses at the Korea Human Resource Development Institute for Health and Welfare, he stated.