

Global Spa Summit JOINING TOGETHER. SHAPING THE FUTURE.

Medicine and Spa Collaboration

Pre-Summit Collaborative Problem-Solving Session

Sunday, May 17th, 2009 4:30pm – 6:00pm

La Salle Rutchi, Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa, Interlaken, Switzerland

Chaired by Dr. Geraldine Mitton Independent Medical Consultant, South Africa and Dr. Marc Cohen, Professor, RMIT University

Scribe: Aras Erekul (Cornell)

Dr. Marc Cohen (session co-chair)

There is a wave of an entirely new way of looking at medicine coming. Today, the majority of health care costs are caused by lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and their short and long-term complications. Health care systems place too much burden on our economies, and they are currently unsustainable.

So, they will need to focus mainly on preventive medicine and wellness in the coming years for our economies to survive.



The wellness industry today is a \$1.1 trillion dollar industry when we take into consideration nutrition, fitness, natural medicine, spas, and hospitality aspects of wellness. It should be acknowledged that once hotels started offering spa services, they also - knowingly or unknowingly – started offering services for wellness and preventive care.

As of today, spa-wellness health care is totally consumer driven and there are many skills that the spa industry can gain from the medical industry, especially in research and insurance coverage areas.

Dr. David Vequist, Founder & Director, Center for Medical Tourism Research, US

In the last decade more and more hospitals started to offer complementary and alternative medical services as well as spa and other comforting services. The cost of MDs is so high that it is unprofitable for spas to employ doctors. In addition, there is already a shortage of medical doctors in many nations, which makes it even harder for spas to recruit physicians. Considering these factors, future wellness practices will not take place mainly in spas, but rather in a new form of establishment will emerge which will combine the hospital, wellness, spa, and hotel services – tentatively we could call it a “hospatel.”

There are already examples of such places all over the world, especially in Southeast Asia. Mediplex in Bangkok, which was created by Dr. Wong, is a nice example. It has residential units, hospital wards, complementary medical facilities, and a fully developed spa on different floors.

Jeff Butterworth, Jumeirah Group Wellness Director, Jumeirah, UAE

Holistic medicine and medicine incorporating spa facilities are two different things and they should be distinguished. It is very challenging to combine holistic and western medicine, as the western medical identity is very strong and controlling.

Dr. David Vequist

If you look at Thailand or India, MDs are also holistic healers trained in traditional medicine. It's only in the western world that this distinction is happening. That's why the new hybrid institutions can be a new model for combining eastern and western modalities.

Dr. Zeki Karagulle, President, Intl Society of Medical Hydrology and Climatology, Turkey

In the European tradition, Balneotherapy and spas are already a part of western medicine especially for healing rheumatologic diseases, but they are not to be confused with pampering spas. We have been practicing "spa medicine" for many decades. The main problem is that there isn't one single journal or scientific source that combines the research being done all over the world on the effectiveness of spa therapies.

Dr. Marc Cohen (session co-chair)

From a governmental point of view, there isn't an evidence based spa therapy concept. So, for the most part spa therapies are not being covered by insurance companies. Once spas will invest in research and prove their effectiveness, it will be easier to get reimbursement.

The Australian government is using a measure called Quality Adjusted Life Year (QALY) and it will reimburse a drug if it achieves a certain amount of improvement on this scale. We have shown that for example proper nutrition can be up to 10 times more effective in increasing QALY than most pharmaceuticals. So, looking into QALY improvements of spa therapies can be a start in research.

Dr. Andreas Wieser, Lanserhof, Austria

According to our research in Austria, the consumer doesn't care about evidence-based medicine at all. What works for their friends and relatives is much more important to them than what is written in medical magazines. So, customer education and communication of the wellness message through spas is as important as scientific research in promoting spas as wellness centers.



Joaquin Serra, Senior Executive Vice President, Natura Bisse, Spain

There is a huge misconnection between all parts of the wellness industry, between doctors, nutritionists, spa therapists, holistic medicine practitioners and so on. It isn't clear who means what when they mention the word "spa". So, all spa associations and parties involved in the well-being of people should come together and define everything from scratch, as our consumer is lost between various available modalities in wellness today.

Dr. Marc Cohen (session co-chair)

In terms of health care systems in our world, there is an immense need to change towards more sustainable models and the spa industry has the potential to shape the future of health care.

Our main challenges in wellness are a lack of:

- Proper research
- A common language
- Dialogue between various parties
- Standardizing the expectations of the customers
- Guidelines for investors to support wellness institutions

However, it is great that we could come together at last and start talking, and this session is just the beginning of a much broader conversations that will take place in the coming years.

Dr. Geraldine Mitton (session co-chair)

With diverse approaches to health and wellness from spas in Europe, the U.S., Asia and Southeast Asia it will be useful to debate the concept of Spa Medicine in future meetings. It will also be helpful to collect scientific research on massage, hydrotherapy, sauna, thalassotherapy, mind body therapies, etc., which validate the benefits of spa therapies. This will benefit not only the consumer, but also act as incentives for health insurance funding.



The Global Spa Summit is an international organization that brings together leaders and visionaries to positively impact and shape the future of the global spa and wellness industry.