

Low-Cost Medical, Dental Procedures Draw Tourists

By Tamara Neely

Tico Times Staff

Lower-cost medical procedures in Costa Rica are drawing the attention of folks from abroad who have to deal with private medical systems and practitioners who charge high fees due in part to their exorbitant malpractice insurance costs. Here is some information about costs for elective and essential procedures in Costa Rica.

Dentistry procedures are among those that can cost significantly less here than in North America or Europe.

The **Clínica Dr. Bernal Pacheco** can replace a porcelain crown for \$200, compared to approximately \$900-1,200 in the United States. To have implant surgery with a gold crown, the cost is \$1,400, compared to approximately \$3,000 in the United States. For more information, call the clinic's offices in San José at 222-8124, or in Alajuela, northwest of the capital, at 441-3992.

Sonrisas para Todos, on Paseo Colón in San José, specializes in concierge service for out-of-towners.

"We can assist with the whole trip - arrange a visit to the beach, hotels, pick up clients at the airport, take them to the hotel, pick them up at the hotel and take them to the clinic. It's very personalized service," said Earl Allen, administrator.

For a molar root canal, the price is \$300 compared to approximately \$650-950 in the United States, and a veneer is \$410, compared with about \$1,150.

For more information, call 222-2263 or visit www.newsmilecostarica.com.

If you're considering whitening your

teeth, Doctor Adriana Seas with the **Cosmetic Dental Care and Whitening Center** is excited about the center's services.

"We use the Zoom! whitening system, developed in the United States," she said. It's the same system used to whiten teeth on the TV show 'Extreme Makeover.'"

The system is painless, and uses ultraviolet light and a peroxide gel to whiten teeth. The procedure takes an hour, and the cost is \$250 including initial evaluation, compared to \$500-800 in the United States, plus a \$100 evaluation, according to Seas.

The center also offers all the regular treatments you'd expect at a dental office, such as polish and fluoride treatments (\$60). For more information, call 291-0525 or visit www.cosmetic-dentalcare.com.

For those who have regrets over tattoos gotten in the heat of a fleeting passion, **Medispas** offers a recourse, using the "Q-switched" rapid-pulsed laser - the same technique employed in the United States, but at a lower cost.

The laser pulses break up the ink into thousands of tiny particles, and the body's lymph system removes the ink over time.

"It's fast, and it's almost pain free; the sensation is similar to getting tattooed," said Andrea Alfaro, manager of Medispas. "We can apply a local anesthetic if the client can't handle the sensation."

The price for tattoo removal depends on the size of the tattoo. A tattoo the size of a 500 coin (nine square centimeters) would require multiple 10-15 second treatments, and would cost \$50 per session. A tattoo the size of a flattened 1.75-liter bottle of water (225 cm²) would require more pulses, so rest



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Whitening Made Easy: The Zoom! whitening system uses ultraviolet light and a peroxide gel to whiten teeth painlessly.

periods are worked into a total session time of 15-20 minutes, at a cost of \$225 per session. Prices in the United States range roughly \$100-500 per session.

The day after the initial session, the tattoo looks like nothing happened. But over the following six to eight weeks the lymph system carries away the ink particles, and the tattoo begins to fade. Alfaro said three to eight sessions are normally required to completely dissolve a tattoo.

Medispas can also remove hair, blemishes and spider veins using various methods. For a full list of services, call 228-7506. Medispas is in Plaza Mundo commercial center in the western suburb of Guachipelin de Escazú, one kilometer north of the Paco commercial center.

In the realm of ob-gyn services, **Dr. Adam Paer**, a bilingual obstetrician gynecologist, delivers babies in private hospitals. Born in New York, Paer studied medicine at the University of Costa Rica.

Examples of prices are \$1,200 for a normal delivery, plus \$200 more for an epidural. Hospital fees are additional and start at \$500, and can run up to \$1,000 for a cesarean section, Paer said. His fee for a C-section is an additional \$400. Monthly examinations cost \$40-60 per visit.

Costs in the United States vary, but are considerably higher.

"I see random cases in which the client

would rather pay for the delivery here than the deductible on the insurance in the United States," Paer said.

The gynecologist also offers a variety of birth-control options. For more information, call 384-8997.

Dino Cozzarelli owns the **Center of Advanced Prosthetics**, in Margarita de Alajuela, northwest of San José. There he fits high-tech prosthetic limbs and feet, orthotics, knee joints and orthopedic braces for the spine, at a fraction of the cost in the United States.

"A new foot in the United States is \$1,500, but I buy them used on eBay and distribute them here for \$300," he said.

Cozzarelli worked in North Carolina for 10 years fitting prosthetics and orthotics, and for 12 years in different cities prior to that. He used to come to Costa Rica three times a year to help handicapped kids at CIMA hospital in Escazú. Now, he is able to provide prosthetics otherwise not available here, and continues to rally donations from the United States for charity work.

For more info, call Cozzarelli at 487-4317 or visit www.protesisavanzadas.com.

In the Central Valley, a new service can deliver pharmaceuticals to your doorstep, 24 hours a day: call **800-MEDICINE**. As in pharmacies here, a single pill can be ordered; one 50 mg pill of Viagra costs €2,500 (\$5), while a 100 mg pill is €5,000 (\$10). Prices include delivery.

The private group is also working on 24-hour doctor and dentist assistance via clinics across the country, as well as mobile dental buses to assist with emergency dental needs. Call 800-DOCTOR and 800-DENTIST for more information.

With regard to nipping and tucking, the boom in plastic surgery here has attracted "concierges" from the United States to come to Costa Rica, scope out reputable doctors and organize tours that include a trip to the clinic and recuperation time on the beaches.

If the idea is appealing, consider verifying the credentials and reputation of the doctor, dentist or plastic surgeon with the governing associations. All medical practitioners must belong to the Costa Rican Doctors and Surgeons Association (232-3433, www.medicos.sa.cr). Plastic surgeons must belong to the Costa Rican Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery (208-1766, www.accpre.org), which lists surgeon members and gives advice, in Spanish, on how to choose one. When choosing a plastic surgeon, it's important to ensure that he or she is accredited with one or both of the above associations. ■

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