Malaysia opens advertising market for health professionals

Daniel Zimmermann

HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany: Malaysia is currently liberalising provisions under the Sales and Advertising Act that will allow health care providers to advertise their services in all media. Restrictions placed on advertising abroad are also to be removed, according to the Ministry of Health. Under the previous act, physicians and dentists were only allowed to advertise through health care-related newspapers or magazines.

Malaysia’s Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai told reporters that the government had decided to remove the ban to promote the country’s growing medical tourism market and raise the number of foreign patients from the current 350,000 to over 550,000. He said that although medical advertisements still require approval from the ministry’s Medicines Advertising Board (MAB), waiting times will be shortened from six weeks to approximately a few days.

Currently, all medical advertisements, including websites, have to receive prior approval by the MAB. Advertisements containing false information can be rejected or even incur a penalty of up to RM3,000 (US$725), or imprisonment of one to two years.

Aussi coalition agrees on more spending for dental care

Claudia Salwiczek

HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany: The new coalition between the Australian Labor Party and the Australian Greens is giving greater priority to dental services. In a policy agreement signed by the new Prime Minister Julia Gillard (Labor) and Green Senator Bob Brown in September, party leaders agreed to raise more money for dental services in the 2011 federal budget. The commitment is seen as a first step in establishing a universal dental health care scheme, which has been in high demand by dentists and patients alike.

After two weeks of political deadlock, Labor recently regained power by winning support of Green Members of Parliament to form a minority government against the Liberal-National Coalition. During the federal election campaign, senior Australian dental officials had criticised the lack of political commitment to oral health across the political landscape and urged all parties to come up with new ideas regarding improving access to dental health care services in the country. (Please see ‘Australia: Oral health at stake in federal election’, Dental Tribune Asia Pacific, No. 7&8, 2010: 1.)

Australian Dental Association (ADA) leader Dr Neil Hewson has welcomed the new agreement as an overdue step to improving federal funding for dental care. He said that his organisation will be open to discussing new initiatives like the ADA’s own DentalAccess scheme that aims to improve access to dental services for disadvantaged groups and people living in neglected rural areas, where patients often have to wait weeks or months for a dental appointment.
India sets new World Record in oral health, heads for another

Indian Dental Association (IDA) officials, who organised the event in cooperation with dental products manufacturer Listerine, said that the successful record attempt was held to carry oral health messages around the country, where most people only use a toothbrush but avoid additional oral care measures such as mouthwash or dental floss. They said that the organisation has also teamed up with Colgate, another large manufacturer of dental products, to set a new record for the most dental check-ups delivered in one day. The event will take place during Oral Health Month in dental camps around New Delhi and Mumbai, and will be joined by Indian actresses Karisma Kapoor and Shriya Saran.

Philippine government investigates lab closure

The Philippine Department of Labor and Employment has started investigations into the sudden closure of a dental facility in the capital Manila that left over 400 workers jobless. The lab, which has been operating under the name Skytech International Dental Laboratories, was allegedly shut down due to bankruptcy over e-mail by its American owner in late August and without prior notice to management and staff, Filipino newspapers report.

Skytech has produced dental replacements, including crowns, bridges and dentures for clients in the Philippines and abroad.

The Department took up investigations after members of the leftist Bayan Muna party filed a resolution during a September parliamentary session that urged the government to immediately look into the matter and “craft measures to prevent similar incidents and ensure the protection of workers’ rights in this age, where major management decisions are relayed and implemented via electronic means.”

Department of Labor and Employment Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz announced it would request domestic and US governmental support to file legal action against the missing owner, who currently resides in the US. She also said that her Department would provide financial compensation to former Skytech employees and discuss measures regarding resuming operations, including the formation of a workers’ cooperative to handle unprocessed local and foreign orders.

Canadian investor Frontier Corporation is rumoured to have an interest in taking over Skytech’s business operations in the Philippines.

Besides other countries in Southeast Asia, the Philippines have become an important hub for the production of dental replacements that cost a minimum there to make, compared to laboratory work produced in Europe or the US. 

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