

Greater Comfort, **FASTER DIAGNOSIS**



Private medical practice in Serbia has been in existence for over 20 years and during this period many privately-run medical facilities and private surgeries have found their rightful place in society, earning great reputations and winning the trust of patients

An issue that has been troubling private medical professionals and patients for years is why Serbia's private healthcare sector has been marginalised and why its inclusion in the state healthcare system has been so slow.

The very few experiences of integrating private healthcare into the Serbian state sector have shown good results. Ten years ago the state health sector signed a contract with privately-run dialysis centres. By so doing, the state no longer had to secure additional investments in building and equipping the dialysis facilities crucial for the well-being of kidney patients who, at the same time, are now able to receive the latest health services, which cost the same as they would if provided by the state health sector. A similar arrangement was also concluded with a privately-run hyperbaric chamber. All of this has led us to believe that the relevant state authorities should take previous experiences into consideration.

What are the advantages of private

healthcare? First and foremost, doctors who are more focused on patients' health issues and where diagnosis takes much less time. Many private healthcare facilities have prearranged programmes that immediately recognise patients' needs, like executive check-ups or health centres specialising in the treatment of specific diseases, where an entire team of medical professionals can

Doctors in the private health sector are more focused on patients' health issues and diagnosis takes much less time

conduct all of the required check-ups in just a day. This is impossible in Serbia's existing state-run healthcare system.

Professor Rajko Hrvačević, MD, who is also the director of the Fresenius Medical Care Company, believes changes are possible and necessary. He says that the society's transition into capitalism inevitably implies equal treatment of the public and private healthcare systems.

"This kind of integration is necessary for at least two reasons. Firstly, patients need to have improved access to health services, i.e. waiting lists need to be shorter. Secondly, patients have to be able to choose health facilities and doctors for themselves, which entails applying the kind of competition principles that always result in improved quality of health services. Of course, all of the aforementioned is a process that requires time, and it is up to us to decide how long this process will last," says Professor Hrvačević.

He also mentions the limited financial resources available to the National Health Insurance Fund, adding that the amount of money allocated to healthcare in Serbia is significantly smaller than in other countries, including neighbouring states. With this in mind, he proposes the compiling of a list of the most urgent health services, including those rendered by private medical facilities, in accordance with current waiting lists.

"First and foremost, this list should include health services which, if post-

poned, could lead to a negative outcome for the patient. These services should be treated as a priority. The goal is to use all available resources, whether state or private, to provide our citizens with timely, high quality health services. In order to reach this goal, we have to rely on the experiences of other countries that have already been through the transition process. Private-public partnership could certainly become one of the modalities for applicable to certain segments of healthcare," suggests Professor Hrvačević.

His opinion is shared by Dr Jasmina

tor as an aid or partner to the state sector. For instance, state hospitals with long waiting lists could sign contracts with private medical facilities possessing both the capacity and the staff to treat patients currently on these waiting lists. Moreover, if the state has no

Patients need to have improved access to health services and to be able to choose health facilities and doctors for themselves. Waiting lists need to be shorter

sector. Quoting the Association's mission, Dr Predrag Stojičić says that the private health sector should have its ID, i.e. a detailed description of all private medical facilities in the country, the number of services they provide and the number of patients they treat. He adds that this would provide a precise overview of the private healthcare sector in Serbia and its potential.

"Also, the existing regulation should be improved, as it is not conducive with private medical facilities. The Association also plans to set up a network that will list the segments in which

FIGURES

- There are close to 1,500 private healthcare facilities in Serbia.
- These facilities have 3,732 doctors.
- If we include nurses in this number, estimates suggest that the Serbian private healthcare sector employs over 10,000 health workers.
- Data compiled by the World Health Organisation shows that 38% of all the money spent on health services in Serbia goes to the private sector.
- Of a total of 45 MRI scanners in Serbia, 23 are located in private medical facilities.
- It has been estimated that 25% of all medical scanners in the country are located in private medical facilities.



Knežević from the Bel Medic General Hospital. She says that the money from the state healthcare budget should work for the patient, regardless of where they receive their treatment – be that a private or state health facility. She also suggests a compromise solution whereby the National Health Insurance Fund would pay private facilities the same money as it would pay state facilities for the services rendered, while the patient can cover the price difference or take out a private medical insurance policy.

"There are many segments in which we can engage the private health sec-

intention of investing in or developing certain healthcare segments in the foreseeable future, this opportunity should be offered to the private sector, which could be interested in taking it on and finding an appropriate solution. There are many opportunities for cooperation and complementing each other, especially in areas like medical treatments for the elderly or cataract surgery," adds Dr Knežević.

The establishment of the Association of Serbian Private Healthcare Providers in September was an important step towards improving the private healthcare

the private sector could help the state, while providing the best possible health services to the people of Serbia. Our long-term goal is to integrate private medical facilities and private practices into the Serbian healthcare system," notes Dr Stojičić.

The Association of Serbian Private Healthcare Providers was established in September 2014 with the goal of regulating the private healthcare sector, reviewing the sector's capacity and investigating the possibilities of integrating the private healthcare sector into the Serbian healthcare system. •

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