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# Medical Tourism's Challenges and Triumphs

✖ During this pandemic, patients sought self-care at home rather than seeking medical attention at a hospital. Because of COVID-19, they avoided treatment, in some instances, costing people their lives. For international patients that situation is exasperated due to travel restrictions.

Even without COVID-19, there are challenges with international patients. The good news is that South Florida is a hot spot for international patients who cite world-class physicians, beautiful weather, beaches, cultural diversity, restaurants and, of course, the people, as reasons to seek treatment here.

### **Among the challenges:**

**Language Barriers:** This can be a challenge, but for a hospital like Holy Cross Hospital, we have physicians and associates that speak multiple languages. In other areas of the country that may not be the case.

**Increased Competition:** More and more hospitals are expanding their service lines to accommodate international patients and are aggressively marketing to them. Those patients now have more choices.

**Expectations from Patients:** At our international services department at Holy Cross, we uphold a VIP and personalized service, patients can call and get an appointment, and we have the flexibility to give them options. We have multiple physicians that can cover multiple patient needs.

**New Patient with an Existing Condition:** While most patients here and abroad are more educated in keeping their records, that is not always the reality. One of the challenges is that medical records provided by the patient or hospitals are in Spanish, which could be difficult to decipher or comprehend, however, most of the times we have the international physician referral in English.

**Testing and Technology:** The technology and testing procedures in the U.S. are at times more advanced than in some foreign countries. The challenges are the imaging we may receive from a patient's physician in another country might not be what we expect or need leading to additional testing once they arrive to Holy Cross.

**COVID-19:** The challenges to hospitals during the pandemic is the significant drop in the number of international patients due to travel bans and restrictions. For patients in elective cases, they have an added layer of testing. They must test negative for COVID-19 in their home country and again when they arrive.

What I am most proud of during my more than seven years in the International Services Department at Holy Cross are the many

patients' triumphs we have been a part of. One patient that stands out during the pandemic was a 98-year-old female patient who was intubated and failing fast in a hospital outside of the U.S., in Central America. She was transported to Holy Cross in March just before the U.S. was shutting down. She tested negative for COVID-19 and began her treatment here. Within three weeks, she was up, ambulating and was discharged. Her family was incredibly appreciative and thankful for how well she was cared for at our hospital.

Another international patient success, a male in his 40's, spent 3-1/2 months at Holy Cross, when he arrived, he was on extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, or ECMO therapy, which saved his life. This leading-edge technology is used for the treatment of critically ill patients with advance cardiac or pulmonary disease. Every year during the holidays, the patient returns to South Florida and visits the rehab unit in the hospital. It has become an annual tradition for him to place an ornament on the rehab unit tree while he is here.

Successful outcomes like these are why I love what I do. It's a credit to the physicians and associates at Holy Cross for the compassion and the highest level of care they show all our patients each and every day. I am honored to be part of the team.

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