

PROPOSAL TO MAKE THAILAND A COSMETIC SURGERY HUB

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THE NATION

The Medical Council and plastic surgeons yesterday urged the government to support their efforts to promote Thailand as Asia's surgical hub, a move they believe could earn the Kingdom as much as Bt200 billion a year.

The doctors and the council have proposed a cosmetic surgery-and-tourism package that would include airfare, cosmetic surgical services, luxury accommodation and shopping trips, according to council secretary Dr Samphan Komrit.

He said patients from the United Kingdom, for example, would be charged Bt300,000 for a breast-surgery package that would include airfare, a stay at a luxury hotel like The Oriental, and a shopping trip in Bangkok. In the UK, the cosmetic surgery alone would cost between Bt400,000 and Bt500,000.

Samphan said demand for cosmetic surgery has increased drastically worldwide, particularly in the United States, Europe and Asia.

In Asia, China has the highest number of people undergoing cosmetic surgery, followed by Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Rhinoplasty ("nose jobs")

and double-eyelid surgery top the list of desired operations.

Many foreigners visit Thailand to undergo aesthetic surgery. Rhinoplasty, double eyelid and sex-change operations are most popular among visitors from Asia and neighbouring countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

"They have learned that Thai surgeons are the best for providing cosmetic surgery, when compared with other countries like South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia," he said.

Dr Attaphan Pornmontarath, president of the Thai Association and Academy of Cosmetic Surgery and Medicine, said private hospitals, hotels and associations of dentists and physicians had formed the Medical Tourism Association to promote Thailand as a medical hub. The new association will facilitate medical services for foreign patients while they are in Thailand.

Later this year, the association will conduct a roadshow in Southeast Asia to attract more foreigners to undergo treatment and cosmetic surgery in Thailand. In the past few years, more than 1.4 million foreign patients came to the Kingdom to undergo treatment at local hospitals. Thailand earns more than Bt120 billion a year from medical tourism, Bt30 billion of which goes to private hospitals and clinics providing medical treatment to foreign patients.

If Thailand becomes an Asian medical and surgical hub, the country could earn up to Bt200 billion annually within the next five years, Samphan said.

Dr Chonlatis Sinratchatanant, president of the Facial Surgery Association, said many Thai youngsters undergo cosmetic surgery in South Korea due to the popularity of Korean youth culture here.