One in five patients worldwide would consider medical tourism

NEW YORK, USA: As movement between countries has become increasingly unrestricted, people are able to receive medical treatment almost wherever they like and medical tourism has thus become a growing phenomenon. A new survey of 18,715 adults aged between 16 and 64 from 24 countries has found that 18 per cent of people are willing to travel to another country for medical or dental care.

ADA updates imaging guidelines

CHICAGO, USA: The American Dental Association has recently published an update of its 2004 recommendations for prescription of dental radiographic examinations. In collaboration with various dental and other institutions, the organisation aimed to provide a document to guide practitioners in using diagnostic imaging appropriately in daily practice.

Among other topics, the document covers receptor selection, hand-held X-ray units, technique charts and radiation-risk communication, which were not covered in the earlier version. In addition, ADA updated its recommendations for shielding to be consistent with guidelines established by the National Council on Radiation Protection and Measurements (NCRP). For example, it now recommends the use of thyroid collars for all patients, which was recommended only for children and pregnant women before.

Rather than being a standard, the new set of recommendations is intended to serve as a useful resource that dentists can refer to if their patients have questions or concerns about the level of radiation exposure, said Dr Sharon Brooks, professor emeritus at the University of Michigan and a consultant to the ADA Council on Scientific Affairs. “We are encouraging dentists to look at the issue of selecting radiographic examinations for their patients on an individual basis, not as a one-size-fits-all,” she said.

According to the NCRP, radiation exposure from dental diagnostics accounts for about 0.2 per cent of the total exposure from natural and man-made sources in the US (5.6 mSv). Nevertheless, ADA recommends that dentists weigh the benefits of taking radiographs against the possible risk of exposing patients to X-rays, as the effects may accumulate from multiple sources over time.

In addition, about 56 per cent reported that they would probably consider going abroad to receive treatment. These were predominantly younger adults, either below the age of 55 (19 per cent) or between 55 and 64 (15 per cent), said that they would not travel to another country for medical reasons.

With an average of 52 per cent, medical tourism was most appealing to people from India, Indonesia, Russia, Mexico and Poland, according to the investigators. In comparison, survey participants from Japan, South Korea, Spain, France, Belgium and Sweden were the least likely to travel for medical treatment. Only an average of about 7 per cent of participants from these countries said that they would travel abroad for medical care.

People who were employed were more likely to consider treatment abroad than unemployed individuals were; and more men (19 per cent) than women (17 per cent) would travel to another country for medical treatment, according to the survey. Many participants said that they would be willing to travel for medical treatment if the costs were significantly lower than in their home country, the investigators said.