

Message of health

Will the spa industry's next move be to become a healthcare provider?

by Alissa Demorest



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The spa industry has been promoting its role as a wellness destination for some time, but there is now a growing impetus to create more links with the world of healthcare. "The spa industry needs to work more with other industries, such as healthcare providers, associations and aestheticians to highlight the spa's role in terms of its healthcare benefits,"

affirms US-based hospitality management company Hutchinson Consulting founder Lori Hutchinson.

At last year's edition of the Global Spa & Wellness Summit, clinical professor of medicine and integrative health specialist Kenneth Pelletier called on the spa industry to be more aggressive in communicating the results from its treatments to medical

and healthcare professionals. "We do not have a healthcare system, we have a disease management system and it's time to move beyond that. The time has come [for the spa industry] be the center of a true healthcare system," he explained.

Pelletier warned, however, that as spas attempt to promote themselves in the health sector, they will no doubt come up against criticism. As a result the spa industry needs more data proving the efficacy of its treatments so it can credibly address healthcare providers, doctors and insurance companies.

This thinking was the motivation behind the SpaFinder-backed initiative SpaEvidence.com, an online portal for consumers and professionals providing results-based studies on spa therapies that launched last year (Pelletier was one of the founding members of the portal). Some industry watchers believe that this kind of initiative is a positive first move. "SpaEvidence.com is positively impacting the industry as it raises awareness on measurable outcomes and benefits of treatments. Making clinical studies and related information not only accessible, but easy to understand for the general public presents a challenge," explains California-based Wellness Tourism Worldwide founder and ceo Camille Hoheb.

She adds that there are simple ways that

The expert view: Wellness Tourism Worldwide founder and ceo Camille Hoheb



"While beauty will always play a part in both medical and spa industries, a focus only on appearance seems outdated and focusing on healthy lifestyles and lifestyle management widens the opportunities for both spa and medical providers.

The spa industry has come far in regard to educating professionals and consumers on the health benefits of traditional spa treatments. Take massage as an example. The US National Institutes of Health is spending \$2.7m on massage research today, up from \$1.5m in 2002. More research adds to the credibility of massage and there-

fore it is more widely understood, accepted and more easily marketed. This is just one example of a spa treatment, but an important one, as it paves the way for other treatments.

Healthcare providers move at a different pace than other industries and with good reason. With 'spa evidence' or clinical research there is the hope that the growing body of research will lead to more buy-in from both the medical community and healthcare consumers and this will eventually lead to better health benefits and insurance coverage. Nearly 40% of Americans purchase CAM (complementary and alternative medicine) services. If research points to effective treatment at lower costs it would make sense. My only caution would be in terms of regulations."