

# **“Self- monitoring” as instrument of quality for the management of balneotherapy centers**

Gurnari G<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup>FEMTEC Technical Commission, San Marino

The demand of quality for balneology is growing. The innovation is a must.

The worldwide demand for “aquatics” is steadily growing, with relevant investment for the construction of aquatic centers and aquaparks leisure/recreational-oriented, where often the water element is completed by other secondary services (restaurants, accommodation, music entertainment, etc.). At the same time, the demand for health prevention - associated with the use of spa facilities and aquatic wellness centers – is growing. Today water physiotherapy is becoming more and more popular, as well as the growing demand for water gym; the healthy properties of water connected to the way of use it, always known and recognized at medical level, are more and more popular among customers and physicians that prescribe the use of water as therapeutic treatment.

While in the field of swimming pools the general discipline for their construction and management is subject to national and regional regulations and recommendations, in the field of thermalism there is a need to highlight the operating and management criteria regarding technology and hygiene & health prevention. The objective is trying to combine the qualitative aspects (offering a certain expected medical service) with the economic ones, following the policy of big investment (high technology) with reasonably short pay-back period (good management, energy saving, high-level maintenance).

For the moment the basic document remains the historic WHO Guidelines (2006), but some regional realities have already adopted regulations based on the rules applied to recreational swimming pools.

Unfortunately, however, the complex issue cannot be simplified because the fundamental conditions of the spa world (closely connected to the healthcare one) are different because the water used can be very mineralized, aggressive and at high temperature and the peculiar chemical-physical characteristics of the precious natural resource cannot be altered, in order not to affect its possible therapeutic applications, even for prevention ones. Furthermore it's necessary to pay attention to health & hygiene aspects – often ignored – inside facilities essentially dedicated to the healthcare and to the wellbeing of customer; it's not conceivable to get out of that facilities in a worse state of health than before.

Waiting for the evolution of scientific, industrial and - above all - political research to identify sustainable criteria in the application of thermalism, regardless of the allocation and the molecular complexity of available water, a basic preventive criterion can be adopted.

The criterion is based on some focal points that can be shared in every reality:

- specific knowledge of the water (chemical-physical parameters, available flow rate, temperature, etc.);
- knowledge of the facility where the water is used, especially for reliability of technology and professional expertise in management;
- knowledge of functions and intended use of water inside the facility, both for leisure and recreational uses and for medical/healthcare ones;
- capability of the industrial market to support the indispensable need to have high quality materials and maintenance products.

By adopting the principle that the spa is actually a healthcare facility and that the basic criterion must be to ensure the quality of hygiene & health prevention and the benefits of therapy - also from the psychophysical point of view - the ideal instrument to support the management of the facility is the “Selfmonitoring Plan”.

Once all of the aforementioned knowledge are acquired, a “cautious principle” is adopted through the following points:

Description of the facility from the architectural and functions point of view (layout, location, etc.)

Description of the functioning of the various technological devices used (swimming pools, hot and chilled water distribution, electromechanical devices controls, electromedical devices, air conditioning and ventilation devices, lighting, shapes and materials for furniture and architecture, etc.)

Analysis of risk of infections

General maintenance plan

Plan for cleaning, specific cleansing, disinfections and sanitization, for every environment, with related modalities of intervention

List of materials, chemicals used and time schedule of intervention criteria

Periodic verification of hygiene & health quality of environments and water

Registration of non-compliance compared to available standards

Definition of remedial actions to correct methods, materials and products in order to guarantee the compliance

Professional roles of reference and their responsibilities

Refresher courses plans

Forms of communication and representation of the adopted quality system.

In this way the “Self-monitoring Plan” becomes not only the reference for the internal management of the facility, but also the reference for the controls, also providing the applicative instruments for ordinary management and for interventions in particular cases of emergency.

This means offering the customer - but also the staff - an additional form of quality to guarantee the prevention of health and goodness of the service.

The Self-monitoring Plan also represents the recorded history of the whole actions and interventions of maintenance (ordinary and extraordinary), providing a precious support for technical-economic analyses; with a good application this "register" becomes also the reference for management savings in economic and financial terms, with benefits for both Enterprise and Customers.

This method of work may seem useless and expensive. It is actually the most advanced "on-line" tool in the management of services related to Thermalism that allows management to constantly check both productivity and efficiency. It then determines an important economic advantage: in fact, it prevents management problems and especially maintenance issues. With proper application you can optimize and rationalize the interventions, planning the various activities and reducing the cost centers.

Finally, this tool allows you to constantly test the controls and verification of the Authorities concerned, which draw interest and value from this continuous traceability system. Its adoption can also be advertised as an irreplaceable quality factor. So at last it costs a little and it gives a lot! A success for Thermalism of innovation.