

How will COVID-19 impact on Balneology?

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¿Cómo afectará el COVID-19 a la balneología?

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BACKGROUND

Governments' obligation is to take care of public health.

The Covid-19 has made it clear that there is a strong need for social and health protection, which allows for an effective interchange between healthcare and social services.

The emergency has also stressed that a globalised health threat requires an adequate international governance and response.

An adequate integration between hospital provisions and the public health approach appears to be an effective response to emergency.

One of the important and underestimated means leading to the improvement of public health is balneology (thermal medicine.)

WHERE DO THERMAL/BALNEAL/SPA/HEALTH RESORT MEDICINE STAND?

Health SPAs/thermal centers **thermal/balneal/spa centres** deliver health care services and provisions, which can also be integrated with social-oriented services, such as rehabilitation.

Yet thermal centers **thermal/balneal/spa/health resort centers** are not always fully *perceived* to be an essential part of the overall national health systems.

There are many reasons for this perception including that health SPAs have less developed their health characters than their tourist corporate image.

Aware of this situation, Femtec promoted and organized an online workshop with the participation of Leaders and Experts from 15 Members of the Federation.

The participants* were CEOs, Managers, Researchers and Medical specialists in balneology. They all accepted the following definition of thermal medicine, which had been stated before by an international body:

THERMAL MEDICINE **thermal/balneal/spa medicine** IS “*an organized system of providing health benefits to patients in health resorts by using mainly natural therapeutic resources, (climate, thermal/mineral waters, mud and dry gases) climatic properties and education to treatment the patients and to promote healthy lifestyle, appropriate **quality of life**, prevention and rehabilitation.*

The participants in the workshop expressed their worries about the progressive elimination of balneology and thermal medicine balneal/thermal/spa medicine from health resorts in many countries, where thermal medicine is often replaced by tourist activities.

It is known that modern population demand for thermal medicine is growing. **Among** The reasons why are the following:

- society is getting older
- health awareness is rising
- the number of people who suffer from modern-age diseases is growing

WHAT NEXT?

Can Covid-19 be a chance for health SPAs to think over their future?

Thermal centres **thermal/balneal/spa/health resort centers** supply provisions and services that are geared to health protection and to the promotion of healthy lifestyles. In this respect, health SPAs fully fall under the concept of “**One Health**” also defined as “**Circular Health**”.

This concept implies that humans and animals’ health conditions as well as the environment quality are strictly intertwined and that an integrated management of public health is badly needed.

Against this background, balneology which is firmly rooted in the Hippocratic tradition, fully comes within the concept of “One Health”, thus being part of the overall response of public authorities to the current pandemic.

In this perspective, health SPAs/Thermal Centers thermal/balneal/spa/health resort centers may play an important role in the implementation of public health policies and actions, especially with respect to prevention.

THE PROPOSAL

FEMTEC in collaboration with other Organizations (ISMH, AFRETH, FoRST) intends to advocate a set of strategies whereby health SPAs/thermal centers are to:

- **strengthen their health vocation also by setting up respiratory rehabilitation services for post-Covid-19 patients, in security/safety conditions of 1. natural source, 2. of devices used to apply natural therapeutic factors, 3. of patients and 4. of personal.**
- **critically revise their recent evolution.**
- **consider their own therapy/therapies to select the one/ones which can better fit with the new demand for health.**
- **develop a set of effective actions and plans in cooperation with GPs and local chemists within the frame of One Health concept.**
- **exploit modern digital technology, including telemedicine.**
- **offer their own expertise to national and regional health systems within partnership agreements.**
- **promote more scientific research projects.**

- **improve their own management and organizational patterns so that they may be more corresponding to new health, social and environmental needs.**
- **overcome their individual-centred approach to be part of an integrated and coordinated network, in accordance with their national traditions and legal system.**

POST SCRIPTUM

We would like to appeal to governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, insurance companies concerned with thermal medicine to take the following actions:

1) to include thermal medicine into health care system in the countries in which it is has not been done yet; to recognize thermal medicine as an integral part of health care

2) the recognition by governments the fact that thermal medicine as a specific field of knowledge requires pre- and post-graduate medical education, taking into consideration the fact that a Balneological subdivision was created in the EU (UEMS / PRM Section), working in the domains of Education, Professional Practice, Scientific research together with ISMH, FEMTEC, FoRST, AFRETh, many Universities and in collaboration with WHO (project Hydro-globe, www.femteconline.org)

3) to provide financial conditions to conduct research in balneology, including the research justifying cost-effective economy

4) to spread and develop the knowledge on the meaning and the role of thermal medicine into the public space as a method of keeping health and preventing illnesses by stimulating nonspecific mechanism of défense.

According to the aforementioned points we hereby declare that we hereby declare that THERMAL BALNEAL/SPAs/HEALTH RESORT MEDICINE SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN COUNTRIES HEALTH SYSTEMS AS A RIGHT OF CITIZENS TO ACCESS THIS MODALITY OF CURE WHERE THERE ARE MEDICAL INDICATIONS FOR THEM

REFERENCIA NORMALIZADA

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