

Bumrungrad confident and prepared to put Thailand once again in the forefront of medical tourism in the world's arena of “new normal” medical practice post COVID-19

The COVID-19 situation in Thailand has been eased with the country ranked first in Asia on the Global COVID-19 Index (GCI) among 184 countries based on each country's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Known to be one of the world's most efficient in mitigating the pandemic situation, Thailand has boosted traveler's confidence. Thus, it is an opportunity to highlight medical and wellness tourism during post COVID-19 to international patients under safe guidelines. As well as to inform Thailand's medical tourism promotion efforts that are aimed at stimulating the country's economy while helping those in need.

According to a medical hub meeting report on medical tourism in 2018, 3.4 million visits by international patients generated more than 1.4 billion Baht in revenue for the country. Thailand features as many as 68 health care facilities with JCI quality standard endorsement, the highest number in ASEAN. This of course reflects Thailand's competitive advantage as a medical hub, a complement to national policy. The top five countries of origin of the international patients seeking medical care in Thailand are the Middle East 12.5%, Myanmar 8.7%, the US 6.2%, the UK 5% and Japan 4.9%, respectively. (Source: Kasikorn Research Center)

On the occasion of Bumrungrad's 40th anniversary, **Pharmacist Artirat Charukitpipat, Chief Executive Officer of Bumrungrad Hospital** revealed that, since first commencing operations on 17 September 1980, Thais and people from all over the world have sought care at Bumrungrad Hospital. Over the course of these past 40 years, caring for our patients has been at the heart of the hospital's mission, and what we focus on always. Though patient-centered care, Bumrungrad delivers care and the best patient experiences – leveraging our high standards of quality and patient safety, along with our best efforts to continuously advance the quality of the treatments. Bumrungrad also focuses on delivering, as well as improving hospital operations and management. Today, this has resulted in Bumrungrad's recognition as a model and destination for international medical tourism. Bumrungrad is the first hospital to receive Global Healthcare Accreditation's COVID-19 certification, indicating the hospital's modern compliance with international health & safety standards in serving medical tourists.

With 40 years of experience, Bumrungrad Hospital's driving focus continues to be delivering world-class patient care. Bumrungrad has raised hospital standards by offering quaternary care, which is the highest level of complex medical care available, involving advanced medical technology. We expect the global trend towards wellness to continue to be popular, and so we work with the VitalLife Scientific Wellness Center – the first center for preventative medicine in Asia, with over 20 years of experience in providing complete wellness solutions for all dimensions of health. The VitalLife Scientific Wellness Center approaches wellness holistically by leveraging integrated medicine, conventional medicine, and preventative medicine; along with in-depth genetic analyses, using the latest medical technologies, to help identify future health risks. This enables health care

practitioners to create personalized wellness plans, resulting in more efficient treatments delivered in accordance with international quality and safety standards.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Taveesin Tanprayoon, Chief Medical Officer of Bumrungrad Hospital, speaking about the background behind the founding of Bumrungrad Hospital in 1980, said that it came about from the thinking of Chin Sophonpanich, founder of Bumrungrad Hospital, who sought to lighten the load of the public sector in providing medical care. We are focused on being a private hospital which gives Thai people the chance to experience world-class complex medical care – all without needing to leave Thailand. The heart of Bumrungrad Hospital lies in selflessly looking after our patients, no matter what. Bumrungrad Hospital is patient centric which results in the best possible care and treatment outcomes for our patients.

Throughout its four decades, Bumrungrad Hospital has worked in a collaborative manner between our doctors and multidisciplinary specialists because private doctors alone are unable to care for their patients with maximum efficiency. Luckily, we have a most efficient team of specialist doctors, like neurologists, cardiologists, obstetricians, oncologists, and specialist nurses, like ER nurses, neo-natal nurses, cardiac nurses, and orthopedic nurses. We have over 100 pharmacists who specialize in fields such as oncology or emergency medicine. In addition, we have physical therapists, nutritionists, medical technicians, and other specialists. Another 4,800 people collaborate to rapidly and efficiently care for our patients around the clock.

Additionally, Bumrungrad uses the latest technology to increase the efficiency and standard of care delivered to our patients in order to increase our medical specialty capacity and ability to treat complex cases, enabling our patients to experience the best outcomes possible. For example, the Robotic Surgery Center helps surgeons perform intricate surgery of the vital organs in delicate or complex cases. Usually, robotic surgery is called for when traditional instruments would make accessing the surgical site difficult or dangerous. In these cases, robotic arms can help increase the quality of surgical outcomes. Furthermore, Bumrungrad is a leader in the use of advanced medical technology, such as IBM Watson for Oncology, for making targeted case-based treatment plans for cancer patients. Thus, enabling Bumrungrad Hospital to successfully collaborate to selflessly look after our patients and leverage technology as appropriate – giving our more than 1.1 million Thai and international patients the confidence they need to make Bumrungrad their medical destination of choice.

As a discussion platform, the press conference on the occasion of Bumrungrad's 40th anniversary gives an opportunity for representatives from the service business sectors and the Tourism Authority of Thailand to share their views in the forum titled "Case study of COVID-19 With the potential of Thailand's service sector to the future of the world". Such various sectors joining hands should somehow be a driving force in generating income and restoring the country's economy, getting through this crisis together. **Mr. Komkrit Duanggern, Director Product Creation Division – Tourism Product Department of the Tourism Authority Thailand (TAT)** reveals that with the new normal, TAT's strategy for medical tourism aims at targeting specific markets, especially in the health and wellness group, which focuses on quality rather than quantity. Emphasis is also placed on three types of tourism: health tourism, medical tourism, and agricultural/food tourism. The selling point highlights would be safety, the unique culture and cuisine, beauty of restored nature, and Thai

hospitality and generosity. TAT is also seeking added value through tourism personnel development and digital platforms for the travel industry, while also strengthening the health care industry. With all this, it is confident that the country's health tourism can sustainably recover.

Mr. Thana Thienachariya, SEVP, Chief Marketing Officer and Head of External Communication & CSR (Acting) of Siam Commercial Bank, thinks that from his perspective, it is necessary for the country to set a good balance between health and economy. A compromise should be maintained until the vaccine is available. For banking businesses, COVID-19 is considered a catalyst for digital banking. Banks have to adjust their digital banking plans, getting them to roll out within a few months instead of over the next few years. This is because customers no longer want to visit branch offices and wish to make all transactions possible on mobile phones. We need to adjust the corporate culture to get along with the new normal too. The key now is to make it work. That is the new principle called 'SCB from Anywhere', which means SCB can work anywhere to support our customers. Importantly, the corporate culture must be conducive to experimenting with new things in a short period of time so that the bank can try things out quickly and not be afraid of failure. In any case, we must quickly adjust for the better. For example, during the COVID pandemic, SCB developed a new digital platform "Robinhood" in just 3 months. It is a food delivery platform that does not collect the GP fee or any additional charges. This helps solve problems for small restaurant operators, to whom the GP fee is a main pain point.

Dr. Piyapong Thanyasrisung, Senior Executive Vice President of Central Department Store Limited spoke about the way forward post-COVID-19, which forced changes to Central's strategic plan to defend their markets offline and online during the "new normal." Currently, increased importance is placed on cleanliness and hygiene for customers, and employees – including retail workers. Central wants our consumers and employees to be confident when coming to shop and work, throughout Central. Central has adopted ozone sterilizers and UV-C disinfecting technologies to sanitize banknotes. Also, social distancing measures limit the number of people entering our department stores and tracking technology records the health information of our employees and customers who come in to our locations. We have also updated our technology platforms to ensure a good customer experience across all sales channels and to handle increased sales velocity on our omni-channel platform – shop 24/7 at www.central.co.th, Central Chat & Shop on LINE via @centralofficial, and Central Call & Shop, for example. Also, we have drive-thru service – where customers can shop and pay without leaving the comfort of their vehicles. Just this past August Central announced it is partnering with Bumrungrad Hospital by opening Central at Bumrungrad, allowing customers to order from Chat & Shop' and 'Call & Shop' and helping patients and visitors solve the problem of finding personal products or gifts. All orders are delivered free to Bumrungrad Hospital, with no order minimums. Orders placed before 18:00 will be delivered same-day – just as if there was a Central Department Store at Bumrungrad Hospital.

Ms. Napas Paorohitya, Chief Marketing Officer of Bumrungrad Hospital, comments, "2020 will be an important time for the Thai medical and public health community to take a big step forward. The COVID-19 pandemic reflects the spirit of Thai doctors, public hospitals and private hospitals in their best efforts to take care of Thai people, keeping them safe from the COVID-19 infection or treating those infected helping them on their way to fast recovery. They all play a part in getting the country through this crisis, confirming that there is an opportunity to rise above a crisis as Thailand

stands out in terms of medical care. This definitely adds to its reputation in medical tourism, promoting its progress towards becoming an international medical hub. Thailand's advantages also lie hospital quality, the expertise of Thai doctors, and the lower medical care costs, by 40-75% compared to the US or by about 30% compared to Singapore, with comparable standards. The medical fee component is obviously an important factor in the global medical hub competition.

This year is considered another very challenging year. During the COVID-19 pandemic onset, every sector was concerned and turned to medical people with hope. As a leading private hospital, we were forced to move faster than usual, faster than any other industry. We need to accept changes, dare to think outside the box with patient safety at the forefront, try new things and make quick decisions. Organizations must make preparations in terms of employees, innovation, organizational learning, and technology – including increasing service levels commensurate with the new normal and customer behavior – for example managing space to create social distance to reduce the risk of contagion, and implementing tele-consultation, home healthcare services, like the Bumrungrad @Home Service Center or “60 Second Service,” which provides basic healthcare, like vaccination or prescription pick-ups. Such services are easy and safest to use and address the problem of shifting social behavior patterns. This is the way all organizations will need to adapt in order to move forward into the new normal.

Hence, development of the healthcare industry will need to be in step with medical staff, new technology, modern tools, and quality of service standards. Another important factor is the creation of partnership networks, to expand the reach out to target audiences and expand the strengths of each organization, and share institutional knowledge. Fostering partnerships will help all members to grow together – which is the key to ensuring organizational endurance in today's business world.

Finally, **Mrs. Lydia Sarunrat Deane**, as a Bumrungrad hospital client, shares her experience, citing that Thailand is a country with one of the best medical systems in the world. The hospital is of quality, rendering professional services, with strict screening and separation measures, highly capable doctors, modern equipment and technology, quality COVID-19 protective gear, effective care of both physical and mental conditions. Patients can easily access medical personnel to seek consultation and the medical charges are fair. As one who experienced COVID-19 infection Khun Lydia says she has a better grasp of medical people's situation. Doctors, nurses and all the multidisciplinary professionals involved have to work under extreme pressure, sacrificing their time with family and working devotedly for the good of the public and for the nation. She sincerely adores and believes in these white-gown warriors. As a final note, Khun Lydia sends her regards and moral support to each and every person working in hospitals. She is confident that as it stands, Thailand can become one of the world's top destinations for medical tourism without difficulty.

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