Uruguays have access to doctors in the United States without leaving the country

**Telemedicine.** The University of Illinois has launched a program in Montevideo.

The University of Illinois has set up an international medical center in Uruguay, a space where Uruguayan patients can get second opinions on complex medical issues from experts in the United States.

In the past six months about twenty patients have submitted their cases to be studied by the doctors at the University of Illinois, located in central-west United States; the University hospital is staffed with more than 600 doctors and approximately 2,500 students attend classes there every year.

The 20 patients who received medical attention were not physically in the US; they were in Uruguay. “Some of the patients live in Buenos Aires or in Spain and had contact with Uruguayan residents. We refer to them as patients of the world; where they live is of little importance”, says Dr. Juan Litvan, Director of Latin America Health Services.

Litvan was born and raised in Uruguay, and lived in the United States for the past 10 years. He is a medical doctor (MD) and a specialized hospitalist, an area which is similar to internal medicine, while focusing more on hospital procedures and the correct application of medical protocols.

Since late 2012 he has worked for the University of Illinois as Director of the International Medicine Program for Latin America. “Basically, the program has three lines: one is to offer second opinions on complex medical cases; the second line is to offer assistance at the University’s facilities for patients travelling to the US, and the third line is to generate academic exchanges,” explained Dr. Litvan during his interview with El País.

The American University has set up an office in Montevideo where Dr. Litvan receives Uruguayan patients who are interested in getting confirmation of their diagnosis, obtaining an answer to a serious medical problem which has not been diagnosed by their treating physician, or in travelling to the US to get a specific treatment or study that is not available locally.

“The information available for each case is analyzed and sent to the University’s hospital. Medical records can be sent together with pathology samples or imaging studies; it depends on each case”, says Dr. Litvan, who has just returned to his home country. The idea behind sending the medical data, clarifies Dr. Litvan, is for the information to travel instead of the patient. Consultations are carried out via videoconferences, where the patient is on one side and the American specialists on the other. The attending local doctor can also participate.

“We do not substitute the treating physician, we provide another point of view”, says Litvan, while adding that the case analysis becomes much more enriching when the Uruguayan physician decides to participate in the discussion together with the patient.

**EXPERIENCE.** The consultations we have received so far have been regarding tumors located in delicate places (such as the head) or pulmonary diseases associated with dark spots or cavities that preoccupied the patients, among others. Mostly we have been dealing with young adults, but we have also received children.

In some cases the experts in Illinois confirmed that the course of the treatment carried out in Uruguay was correct; in other cases, they defined new therapeutic options that could be followed.

When consulted about the cost of the service, the Uruguayan doctor said that the initial interview in which the patients present their problem is free of charge; consultation and analysis by the experts in the US costs around USD 1,500, depending on the complexity of the problem.

On another note, for those patients who wish to travel to the US, the university has a personal navigator service: patients are received, oriented in all matters related to their arrival in the US, the dynamics of the health center, and the medical procedures to be carried out.

The purpose of this service is to minimize the stress, tension and vulnerability usually experienced by those who have to travel for medical purposes.

Why did they choose to set up an office in Uruguay? And why would a patient be interested in Illinois? “I suggested Uruguay because it is a small country with a good educational level, where this program could be tested as an experience that could be later repeated elsewhere”. As far as why a patient would be interested in the hospital of the University of Illinois, Dr. Litvan explained that it is one of the most experienced hospitals in robotics surgery, there is also a world renowned expert on fertility issues, and additionally the hospital has accumulated expertise over a great number of cases, which enhances precision and reduces the risk of complications in surgery.

**Key Facts**

**What is the program about?**
The University of Illinois has set up offices in Montevideo for their International Medicine Program, a system which offers second opinions to patients who wish to receive a diagnosis on a complex pathology issue or who would like to consult on recommended therapy options.

**What happens if the patient has to travel?**
The program offers the possibility to have studies done at the University Hospital, specialized in neurosurgery and highly complex pathologies.

**How to get in touch?**
To get in touch with the program in Uruguay, please email Dr. Litvan: litjuan@uic.edu