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Galichia aims to be medical destination

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Galichia Heart Hospital hopes to expand its medical tourism program through a contract it signed this week with AWAC, a medical management company based in Augusta, Ga. In most medical tourism programs, Americans go abroad for procedures offered at a fraction of the cost they are in the United States.

But Galichia and a few other U.S. hospitals have begun offering some procedures, such as heart bypasses or hip replacements, at a deeply discounted fee, in an effort to lure business. That's what Galichia is doing with the new contract, which will expose nearly 1 million potential customers to the hospital.

AWAC works with 20 third-party administrators of self-insured health plans. It acts as their medical directors and offers disease management and cost containment programs for 954,000 people, said Gordon Jones, director of special projects for AWAC.

Jones said the company contracts with medical centers across the United States for specialized services such as organ transplants or oncology treatment. "The pitch by Galichia has been that their program is a medical tourism model but in the United States, so we have contracted with them to where we will promote their service as an option," he said.

Stephen Harris, Galichia's CEO, said the contract could have a ripple effect in the economy by bringing new people to Wichita.

Jones said AWAC hasn't quantified the potential business. With the contract just signed, AWAC must first market the option internally and then to the third-party administrators and their customers, he said.

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