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National Health Care Plan in Chaos

Squabbles between the new nationwide Family Health Plan (SFS) and the private Health Plan Administrators (ARS) are escalating.

Difficulties agreeing tariffs for medical expenses are at the root of the problem between the SFS, the ARS's and the National Association of Private Clinics.

The Dominican Medical College recently accused the four leading Health Plan Administrators (roughly 85% of the market), Humano, Universal, SDS and another unnamed of trying to sabotage the SFS through a series of manoeuvres designed to cause chaos among the clients.

Manuel Escarraman, a physician and president of the Dominican College of Surgeons pointed out that ARS's had been paying around RD\$5,295 for an appendix surgery, but now under the SFS they would only pay RD\$4,200.

Escarraman suggested that patients would lose out if physicians refuse to treat them under the lower ARS fee structure. This could lead to more patients paying higher fees for private consultations.

At a recent Dominican Medical College press conference, Dr. Rosalda Damiano, president of the Society of Pediatrics, also drew attention to the fee differences and urged physicians not to sign ARS contracts until the matter has been resolved.

The National Association of Private Clinics (ANDECLIP) representing 237 clinics countrywide, has also given the ARS's an ultimatum of one week to agree on the tariffs for medical expenses.

Rafael Mena, the association's president, announced that if an agreement is not reached by this time, they will be forced to suspend the basic health plan services.

The ARS's have immediately rejected the ultimatum, stating that they are taking care of patients, even though the state hasn't paid them fully. They also say that only about one in a thousand of their insured patients have complained about their service.

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sponsors for the remaining amount.

So far the costs are covered by a loan, but "we all carry the risk to have massive debts after our exams," says Alwin Franke, 19, one of the project's organisers.

The Methodos project is not for slackers - Franke explains: "We will study in small groups of four or five from 9am to 5pm, six days a week."

Internet Spelling Troubles

Three Norwegian tourists who booked flights over the internet spent their Greek holiday in France. Bente, Marit and Knut had intended to fly to the Greek island Rhodes, but due to a keying error, they instead booked to go to the French town of Rodez, north of Toulouse.

The French town is proud of its old city centre which dates back to around 1200, but it is far from the famous white beaches of Rhodes.

It's not known how much they enjoyed their vacation. Let's hope next time they're more careful - there's always Rhode Island in the US!

Goat Sacrifice for Plane

Nepal Airlines recently sacrificed two goats in front of one of their Boeing 757's at Kathmandu airport. Apparently, there had been persistent technical problems, thought to be electrical, with the aircraft leading to the postponement of a number of flights in recent weeks.

The offering was made to Akash Bhairab, the Hindu god of sky protection, whose symbol is seen on the company's planes.

The airline said that after the ceremony the plane successfully completed a flight to Hong Kong.

"The snag in the plane has now been fixed and the aircraft has resumed its flights," said senior airline official Raju KC.

Baby Candy Burglars Licked

Italian police were able to track down and arrest a seven-man gang of Romanian thieves after they stole

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