

A Guide to Russia's Healthcare System

Is it possible to get free healthcare in Russia? It is – if you are familiar with some features of Russia's Healthcare System. Will medical services be provided efficiently? This article offers you a ready-made plan for visiting Russia's hospitals and describes some features you should know before going there.

Healthcare in Russia is a struggle. For a country that was once lauded as having one of the world's finest healthcare systems, today it can best be described as offering a fair standard of care. The 2021 Health Care Index lists Russia's system as 58th best out of 89 countries, with a very low score for quality of infrastructure. A Bloomberg report ranks Russian healthcare last out of 55 developed countries based on the efficiency of state healthcare systems. This is a serious fall from grace for a country that was once considered among the most innovating and scientifically progressive in the world. While there are some bright spots of progress, Russia's healthcare system faces significant challenges.

Overview of Russia's Healthcare System

Since 1996, Russia's constitution has provided citizens and residents with the right to free healthcare. This is provided by the state through the Federal Compulsory Medical Insurance Fund (also called the OMI or Obligatory Medical Insurance). It is funded through payroll and employer contributions. The Russian Ministry of Health oversees the system and its two million employees. Federal regions, such as Moscow, also have their own departments of health that oversee local administration.

Overall, OMI based care is comprehensive. It covers the cost of inpatient care, all procedures that require an overnight stay at the hospital, chronic conditions, maternal and newborn care, vaccinations, and more.

Like many countries, public hospitals in Russia struggle with long wait times and overcrowding. Unlike others, sometimes this reaches extremes and has a significant impact on the quality of care patients receive. Compounding the problem is the fact that public hospitals are few and far between outside of large cities. Patients sometimes feel they're stuck between being in a very crowded hospital or having no hospital at all.

The bottom line is that Russians aren't happy. According to a 2016 survey by Moscow-based polling agency Levada Center, only a paltry 2% of Russians reported being proud of their healthcare system. Some of the most alarming complaints include filthy hospitals, crumbling buildings, and even doctors and paramedics working while intoxicated.

How the Healthcare System is Funded

Every Russian citizen and working resident receives free public health insurance through Russia's Obligatory Medical Insurance (OMI). Of course, free isn't really free. Employers pay about 2% to 3% of salaries into a social tax, part of which is used to fund the healthcare system.

In general, healthcare in Russia is underfunded. The country spends between 5% and 6% of its annual GDP on healthcare. This is well below the global average, which sits at about 10%, and puts Russia close to the bottom of all European countries.

There's another financial aspect of Russia's healthcare system that's rarely discussed. Bribes and tips aren't unheard of and are sometimes even expected as patients jostle for care amidst limited resources.

Healthcare Options for Expats and Foreigners

For expats, gaining access to Russia's healthcare system is fairly straightforward. If you're working in traditional employment, your employer will take care of you. They will ensure that you are properly registered for public healthcare. They will pay 2% to 3% of your salary into a social taxation fund. A percentage of this tax is then paid into the national healthcare fund. Once your employer makes their initial contribution, you're considered to be enrolled.

You can also register for Russian healthcare directly by yourself. You need to visit your local health center or doctor's office. Unless your command of Russian is superb, bring a local friend with you to translate. You will need to provide your passport, your Russian residency permit, and proof of address to complete the application.

Now that you know how to get medical services in Russia, use the guide above and try using your newly acquired knowledge!