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RM1b expected from medical tourism this year

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PUTRAJAYA: Medical tourism is expected to chalk up a revenue of RM1 billion this year, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak said.

He cited the country's medical expertise for the boost, saying that its healthcare standard is comparable and, sometimes, better than in most Western countries.

"Malaysia's share of the medical tourism market has nearly doubled in the last four years - in 2014 it reached 770,000 patients, bringing in revenue of around RM700 million.

"This year, those figures are expected to rise still further to 930,000 patients, and revenue of RM1 billion," he said during the launch of the *Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) Fifty-Five Years 1959-2014* book at his office here yesterday.

He added that the government always strives to improve its medical tourism among foreign patients.

Citing a report from an American publication that Malaysia's healthcare system had



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Najib at the launch of the *Malaysian Medical Association Fifty-Five Years 1959-2014* book in Putrajaya yesterday. Looking on are Subramaniam (left) and Ashok.

received top score out of 25 countries surveyed including Spain, France and Ireland, he said such excellence is reflected in the number of foreigners coming to Malaysia for medical procedures.

However, he said the country still lags behind neighbouring countries in the industry.

"We still have a long way to go, and I intend to make this a priority area to enhance our competitiveness in the field of medical tourism."

Najib also said the government is very serious in tackling the challenges of rising expectations and cost in healthcare.

"That's why in Budget 2015, we set out to priorities the well-being of the people, and allocated RM23.3 billion for healthcare facilities," he said.

Also present were Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam and MMA president Dr Ashok Zachariah Philip.