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## Cuban treatment for cracking cocaine use praised

By **ROB NAY, SUN MEDIA**

In order to kick his 14-year cocaine addiction, Earl paid to travel to Cuba for treatment as part of a new program started in Winnipeg.

Earl, who asked that his real name not be used, became a test subject for Choice Medical Services in an effort to overcome his \$5,000 per month addiction.

He contacted the organization, affiliated with Jorgenson Group of Companies in Winnipeg, in early May and spent two months in Cuba at a drug treatment facility.

"I found by getting away it made me focus on the program," he said.

Once in Cuba, Earl surrendered his passport and was placed in a drug-treatment facility where doctors treated him through a 12-step program.

The total cost for the travel and treatment was about \$12,000, he said.

Since returning home earlier in the summer, Earl said he's gone back to work as a business manager and hasn't had any relapses.

### 'MEDICAL TOURISM'

Choice Medical Services, which refers to itself as a "medical tourism company," has signed agreements with Cuba's ministries of tourism and health, said company founder Daren Jorgenson.

Patients pay a fee to Choice Medical based on the treatment and the company arranges hospital stays in Cuba. Officially starting up at the beginning of August, Choice Medical Services has worked with about 200 test patients on a trial basis during the past year.

Patients have made use of the service for eye, knee and shoulder surgeries as well as drug rehabilitation and the goal of the company is to provide an "effective and affordable service," said Jorgenson.

Provincial Health Minister Theresa Oswald said people have always had the option to travel elsewhere for health care.

"It's never been our government's position to want to infringe on people's right to do that," she said.

Oswald added that reducing waiting lists has been one of the NDP government's priorities and that while "incredible progress" had been made, there remains "more work to do."

People should make sure to do their research before travelling outside Canada for health care, said Oswald.

Jorgenson said the Cuban government has been supporting tourists visiting for medical procedures.

"They're not displacing services to Cubans to open up spots to Canadians and Americans," said Jorgenson.