

Jacksonville Wins State Grants To Promote Medical Tourism

by Jessica Palombo

First Coast tourism marketers are getting an injection of state money to help promote Jacksonville's medical services. Area medical providers are helping match a pair of state grants totaling more than \$100,000.

In December, a woman who lives in Switzerland was sitting in her Jacksonville doctor's office after an eye surgery. In a video taken by the doctor, Vanessa Williams tells him she's finally able to see herself in the mirror.

"I could even see in the shower," Williams said. "I could just see 'Shampoo,' 'Conditioner.' Simple things."

Williams says she came to Jacksonville from Europe because an Internet search led her to Dr. Arun Gulani. Gulani says his clients come from around the globe.



Gulani said, "This city and the way patients are flying to us, we truly, I think Jacksonville could be the medical destination for the world."

That's the message the Visit Jacksonville tourism board says it's working on getting out more aggressively—thanks to state grants it won this month.

The grants are meant to target both medical convention planners and individual patients from around the world. Visit Jacksonville tourism board spokeswoman Patty Jimenez says the grants will help the city beef up its existing medical tourism marketing campaign.

Jimenez said Visit Jacksonville will place digital ads on websites where people are searching for medical services. She said the ads will show Jacksonville as a great destination.

"We look forward to being able to target a lot of digital marketing," Jimenez said.

State tourism board Visit Florida awarded the grants to Jacksonville totaling more than \$100,000 dollars. Visit Jacksonville and medical providers including Mayo Clinic are providing matching funds to double that amount. Amelia Island also received nearly \$43,000 to market as a medical convention destination.