

6. OPPORTUNITIES IN HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Imports of medical services into Mexico are a fairly recent phenomenon. This market is significant, and growing, but since there are no official data on trade in services, it is difficult to quantify. The main sub-markets are hospital construction services, health services management, information services, equipment services, waste management, training, and emergency services.

HOSPITAL CONSTRUCTION SERVICES

In the past, the construction of Mexican health care facilities was not always closely scrutinized. Often, hospitals were built for political reasons rather than to respond to real needs.

During the administration of President Salinas, from 1988 to 1994, the *Secretaría de Salud (SS)*, Secretariat of Health, undertook a major review of existing facilities and needs for the future. The outcome was the *Plan Maestro de Infraestructura*, Infrastructure Master Plan, in 1989. The *SS* subsequently began planning new health care facilities to more effectively meet the needs of the population. Initially, emphasis was placed on completing existing projects and refurbishing existing hospitals. The focus was on small hospitals in the 30-bed range. Experts now suggest that between 20 and 30 new 100-bed hospitals are needed, as well as another 30 in the 30 to 90 bed range.

All hospital construction projects must be approved by the *Secretaría de Salud* and by the state or the *Departamento del Distrito Federal (DDF)*, Department of the Federal District, health authorities. Project proposals are assessed according to both health care and architectural standards.

According to *SS* officials, there are fewer than 50 companies in Mexico involved in hospital planning and construction. No more than 20 are considered to have the capability of meeting *SS* standards. Although Mexican architects and engineers regularly apply imported techniques in their designs, few have foreign partners. This represents an interesting opportunity for Canadian firms. Services with good potential include the following:

- innovative structural design programs for small projects;
- prefabricated steel structures and buildings;
- building-monitoring and maintenance systems;
- new design concepts for "intelligent" hospitals;
- bio-climactic control and ventilation systems;
- materials for wall, floor and ceiling finishes, especially for sterile rooms;

