

# The Seattle Times

## Nation & World

[Low-graphic news index](#) | [Mobile site](#)

---

Friday, December 21, 2012 - Page updated at 09:30 p.m.

## German health care favored by leaders from Mideast, Russia

By **CHRIS COTTRELLNICHOLAS KULISH**  
The New York Times

BERLIN — When Jalal Talabani, the president of Iraq, needed advanced medical care for a stroke suffered this week, he flew not to the United States or Britain but to Germany, for treatment in the capital, Berlin.

For many Americans, Germany is known as a way station where soldiers wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan received immediate medical care on U.S. military bases. But it is also a popular destination for wealthy and prominent patients from the Middle East, Russia and beyond, experts say.

Before the Arab Spring uprisings, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak traveled to Munich in 2004 for back treatment and to Heidelberg in 2010 to have his gallbladder removed. Last year, President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan reportedly had a surgical procedure on his prostate at the University Medical Center Hamburg-Eppendorf.

According to German government statistics, the number of hospital patients from the United Arab Emirates rose to 1,754 from 339 between 2000 and 2010, the most recent year available. From Saudi Arabia, the figure climbed to 712 from 143. The numbers from Iraq were smaller but still rose to 176 from 95. In the same period, the number of Russians jumped to 4,873 from 842.

“We have one of the worldwide best health-care systems, and people from abroad know that,” said Isabella Beyer, research associate in medical tourism at the Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences. Talabani, 79, is among them; he was treated in Germany before for back trouble.

Talabani is being treated at Berlin’s Charité hospital, which is more than 300 years old and is one of Europe’s largest university hospitals. The storied institution was home to several Nobel Prize winners, including Robert Koch and Paul Ehrlich. A spokeswoman for Charité, Manuela Zingl, confirmed that Talabani was being treated there but said she could not disclose any information on his condition because of rules on medical privacy.

Talabani was said to be in “stable” condition after having the stroke this week, though there were unconfirmed reports that he was in a coma. He was taken to the Baghdad Medical City on Monday.

He was treated there by medical experts from Iran, Germany and Britain, according to Iraqi staff members. Barazan Sheik Othman, the head of the presidential media office, said Talabani left for Germany accompanied by doctors after they established that he was well enough to be transferred.

Hospitals and clinics in Germany have increasingly sought to market themselves as a destination for international patients. Beyer said Germany benefited from its reputation for

high-quality care and lower prices than the United States. Shorter waits and the proximity to the Middle East also helped.

“Before, a lot flew to Geneva,” said Salah Atamna, 44, whose business, Europe Health, seeks to link patients from abroad with German hospitals and clinics.

Many wealthy Arabs would fly to Germany in the summer to escape the heat at home, Atamna said, scheduling their vacation to coincide with treatments. They often traveled with relatives and large entourages. In addition, after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, it became harder to acquire visas to the United States, and medical travelers began searching for alternatives.

[E-mail this article](#) | [Print this article](#)