

# Visit Alexandria launches new medical meetings compliance initiative

**City's tourism authority to begin training event planners on health care regulations**

BY CHRIS TEALE

With more than 50 health care associations already based in Alexandria and the National Science Foundation set to open its new headquarters next year, officials with the city's tourism authority Visit Alexandria believe the time is right to take advantage and welcome more medical and health care meetings to the Port City.

To help local restaurants, hotels and meeting planners across the city, Visit Alexandria is offering training for suppliers to earn Meeting Professionals International's Health care Meeting Compliance Certificate. The training will include presentations on compliance regulations, reporting requirements and techniques for managing healthcare meetings. Officials said Alexandria is among the first mid-size cities to offer the training.

The first four-hour course is scheduled for April 7 at the Hilton in Old Town, and will be led by Pat Schaumann, director of professional development for the health care sector of MPI Academy, the organization's educational arm. Registration costs \$399 for attendees and includes lunch followed by a tour of city hotels and a reception and graduation ceremony at Hotel Monaco.

Visit Alexandria officials, as part of the organization's "Meetings Made Extraordinary" campaign to bring more meetings to the city, see it as a key opportunity given the location and services on offer.

"We feel that because of Alexandria and all the amenities that we have, we have everything



COURTESY PHOTO

The city's tourism authority Visit Alexandria is launching an initiative to encourage more medical meetings in Alexandria by offering a one-day compliance certificate program to hotels, restaurants and meeting planners. The Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum (left) is just one way in which health care and meeting professionals will be able to engage with history.

that these medical meeting planners are looking for," said Lorraine Lloyd, senior vice president of sales at Visit Alexandria. "We have the perfect destination, we have the perfect hotels, we've got the location, we have the amenities and everything that these planners are looking for. It's an ideal city for these small to mid-sized medical meetings."

The certification came into being after the passage of the Physician Payments Sunshine Act by Congress in 2010. The law looks to increase the transparency of financial transactions and relationships between health care providers and pharmaceutical manufacturers by having certain payments and items of value given to physicians and teaching hospitals reported to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

As such, those who plan and



FILE PHOTO

**“ That all really adds to the whole destination and the whole draw to come to Alexandria. To take these pharmaceutical companies up to the Apothecary that has the same herbs that were there back in the 1700s and 1800s is just phenomenal.”**

**-Lorraine Lloyd, Senior VP of sales, Visit Alexandria**

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put on meetings involving representatives from the likes of medical associations, pharmaceutical associations, biotech and medical device companies must ensure they are within the compliance laws and that no fraudulent activity is occurring.

Brooke Newton, sales manager at Visit Alexandria, said that the course requires active participation from attendees to earn the certificate, while there are opportunities to continue education afterwards in keeping with ever-changing health care compliance laws.

“Health care meeting pro-




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PHOTO/CHRIS CRAIG

The Health care Meeting Compliance Certificate is offered by Meeting Professionals International, with the first training program offered April 7 at the Hilton Old Town. The meeting's proximity to the National Inventors Hall of Fame (above) located within the Patent Trade Office nearby is an added benefit to attendees.

professionals must balance unprecedented changes and demands on understanding the global impact of healthcare compliance,” said Schaumann in a statement. “They must tackle tough regulations, adjust and readjust priorities while keeping one eye on the short term and the other on long-term survival — a tough job without a continuing flow of knowledge. It is imperative to stay educated on globally regulatory topics through opportunities such as earning your HMCC.”

The health care meetings industry has become increasingly lucrative across the country, with over one million set to be hosted nationwide this year. Officials pointed to the example of San Diego, which while a larger city with more amenities than Alexandria, nonetheless pulled in \$425 million in economic impact from its 15 health care meetings in 2014.

“It can have a big [economic] impact,” said Lloyd. “Obviously we don’t have the center and the facilities [like San Diego] for that scope, but we’ve got the four-star boutique hotels that satisfy the smaller meetings and then we’ve got the more business-type properties like Hilton and Best Western that would work with the midsize groups.”

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“ Alexandria is the perfect destination for those small to midsize healthcare meetings looking for a new destination. The history of Alexandria alone is fascinating and lends itself to having a memorable meeting, but the location — smack dab in the middle of pharma alley on the East Coast and home to the highest number of health care associations in the surrounding area — is a conversation starter.”

- Jacqueline Beaulieu, Executive director of education and events, BlueHive

midsize healthcare meetings looking for a new destination,” said Jacqueline Beaulieu, executive director of health care education and events at Worcester, Mass.-based marketing firm BlueHive, in a statement. “The history of Alexandria alone is fascinating and lends itself to having a memorable meeting, but the location — smack dab in the middle of pharma alley on the East Coast and home to the highest number of health care associations in the surrounding area — is a conversation starter.”

Already signed up for the course on April 7 are Visit Alexandria’s hotel and hospitality partners, including restaurants that might service industry professionals and meeting attendees.

Both Lloyd and Newton said that the city’s long

heritage of providing health care — captured in PBS’ recent Civil War drama “Mercy Street” — stands it in good stead for this new campaign, especially as it looks ahead to a bright new future.

The Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum and the Inventors’ Hall of Fame at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office are just two ways that Visit Alexandria is looking to history to engage with its audience of health care and meeting professionals.

“That all really adds to the whole destination and the whole draw to come to Alexandria,” said Lloyd. “To take these pharmaceutical companies up to the Apothecary that has the same herbs that were there back in the 1700s and 1800s is just phenomenal.”