

# HEALTH STYLES OF THE SUPERRICH AND FAMOUS

Champagne dreams and caviar wishes are humdrum. These days UHNWIs are splashing out big bucks on Monaco's 5-star check-up facility.

BY NANCY HESLIN



**I'LL BE HONEST**, as an adopted child, I grew up blissfully unaware of any family medical history. Never had any concerns that breast cancer affects every other generation or that heart disease is waiting to claim me as a statistic, as it did my father and grandfather. So the idea of spending an entire day at the Princess Grace Check-Up Unit—Monaco's one-stop preventive health care facility—for a battery of tests with names like the "supra-aortic trunk ultrasound" or "computed tomography" and the possibility of a diagnosis of some genetic disorder, terrified me.

"Can I do the tests without getting the results?" I put the question to Dr Gilles Chironi, Head of the Check-Up Unit. He replies with a blank stare, and then in his reassuring style says to me in English: "You'll be 50 this year. Even more reason for a tailor-made check up."

Operational since February 29, 2016, the 5-star luxury Check-Up Unit was the vision of the Strategic Council for Attractiveness, which was created in 2011 as part of Prince Albert's roadmap for the future to meet the needs of the public in all aspects of business and daily life in Monaco. The goal was to create an affordable but comprehensive health care center—with luxury suites and amenities to provide security and anonymity—to attract residents and tourists who were hitherto

PHOTOS: FORBES MONACO

traveling to the American Hospital in Paris, the Mayo Clinic, or elsewhere in Germany or Switzerland for the same personalized and multidisciplinary outpatient service.

Dr Chironi, a Monegasque, was the ideal candidate to lead the multilingual team of seven. The 53-year-old has extensive training as a specialist in cardiovascular prevention having worked and taught at the University and Assistance Publique-Hôpitaux de Paris, the largest hospital in Europe.

"Since we opened three years ago, we've received about 250 patients a year, a maximum of three a day," explains the medical coordinator who studied in Lyon, France. "What's interesting is that we have around 40 different nationalities coming here, some to access the specialist departments at Princess Grace Hospital and others for a second opinion."

But Dr Chironi points out that this is no *hôpital de jour* reimbursed by the CCSS, Monaco's Social Security. The Princess Grace Check-Up Unit is private healthcare providing a medley of multidisciplinary tests within a single block of time and in one single location. The average fee, including meals and out patient accommodation, is €4,000 but can range from €2,500 to €5,500 for a thorough check up.

#### WHEN I ARRIVE AT THE TAMARIS

hospital building at 8 a.m., I'm greeted by Houdou, the cheery *gouvernante* (executive housekeeper), who takes me to Suite #2, one of three 80-square-meter luxury suites on the seventh floor, each of which is large enough to host an entire family, and with a bird's eye view of the Principality that would make any 5-star hotel envious.

Houdou gives me a tour—a living room with an office desk, two bathrooms and a bedroom—and hands me an iPad that controls the volume for MSNBC, dims the room lights and closes my shutters. Before he can take my breakfast and lunch orders, head nurse Leslie arrives to take my blood work and blood pressure, and do an electrocardiogram—all in-room.

Leslie, who speaks five languages, whisks me outside to the hospital, less than 50 steps away, for my first two



appointments, a non-enhanced thorax CT scan and abdomen and pelvis ultrasound.

I feel like Henry Hill's girlfriend Karen in the Martin Scorsese film *Goodfellas* as she's guided through the hubbub of the Copacabana kitchen. Leslie escorts me



through a labyrinthine of corridors and busy waiting rooms—although, unlike my friend Henry, I didn't have to leave a fistful-of-dollars trail along the way to get preferential treatment.

As a Canadian, cutting the line is cause

to be stripped of your nationality. But Leslie assures me that the Check-Up Unit has assigned appointment times within the public hospital's scheduling. Still, it's very VIP. I never wait more than five minutes to see a doctor, have a screening or get the results after wards, which are placed in an oversized attaché case dedicated to my check up. The doctor's attention is all mine.

When I return to my suite, warm croissants and *pains au chocolat* are waiting, along with coffee and freshly squeezed orange juice. Houdou the mind reader also brings me the *Guardian* newspaper. "Thought you might like this," he says.

At 10 a.m. I'm off for an ear, nose, and throat consultation followed by an audiometry test, and, after a clumsy few minutes of raising my hand to sonar sounds, I am surprised to learn I have the hearing of a *jeune fille*.

Thirty minutes later, I'm back on the 5th floor at the Tamaris building for a cardiac ultrasound and supra-aortic trunk ultrasound under the care of Dr. Chironi, who specializes

in detecting early alterations of arteries and the heart. Having to lie on your side *torse nu* with ECG wires and electrodes stuck all over you is a cruel game gravity plays on an ageing female. To cover my awkwardness, I ask Dr. Chironi if over the last three years

he's had to deliver any life-threatening news to a Check-Up patient.

"Only a few times, when we discovered what we believed was a cancerous tumor. But we couldn't tell the patients directly, we prepared them until other tests ruled out whether it was benign or not. With the hospital, we have all facilities to provide treatment for any situation requiring immediate attention."

Princess Grace Hospital Center, which is currently undergoing a 10-year, €1 billion renovation, is not a typical public hospital—not least of which is because its director is a 36-year-old woman, Benoite de Sevelinges. Since it was founded in 1902, the hospital has strengthened its reputation as a wellness destination offering the best medical practitioners with state-of-the-art equipment (which can be programmed to give instructions in multiple languages), often unique to the region or Europe, like the Intensity Modulated Radiation Therapy system which targets complex tumors without irradiating healthy organs.

Additionally, the hospital has a close relationship with the University of Pennsylvania, the state where Princess Grace was born, which allows an exchange of expertise and discussions on complex cases.

Back on the table, Dr. Chironi tells me one of my valve flaps doesn't close quite straight but "not to worry." I trust him. Really, I just want to get dressed.

My guide for the rest of the day is nurse assistant Lamia. She accompanies me back to my suite for a gastroenterology consultation with Dr. Demarquay who is quite curious about my absolute intolerance to alcohol and eggs since my gallbladder

was removed in 2000; I have not had a glass of champagne for nearly two decades.

With a knock on the door exactly at noon, Lamia tells me we need to leave for the effort stress test. "You have the heart rate of an athlete," Dr. Rinaldi tells me, as I sweat away on the stationary bike. Sure, an athlete with a faulty flap.

By 1:10 p.m., I'm back in my room, the queen bed is calling me to take a nap. No chance, Houdou arrives with

**The Global Wellness Institute evaluates the wellness economy at \$4.2 trillion and says it continues to expand faster than global economic growth.**

**Wellness Tourism is now widely recognized as a fast-growing, high-opportunity tourism niche segment and is expected to grow 7.5%, from \$639.4 billion in 2017 to \$919.4 billion by 2022.**

(SOURCE: GLOBAL WELLNESS ECONOMY MONITOR, OCTOBER 2018)

the first course of my lunch, a creamy burrata mozzarella with pesto salad. This is followed by a club sandwich (confession: I originally ordered the foie gras hamburger with fries) and rounded off with a tray of small pastries and chocolates. All the meals are prepared fresh, and with flavorful creativity, by chef Jenifer who has a dedicated kitchen within the unit. There's also a selection of wines, including a Chateau Giscours 2010

Margaux from the personal collection of François Louis Vuitton for €230, this is Monaco after all.

I'm exhausted, and grateful to call Suite #2 home in-between exams and screenings (I had eleven in total). Leslie reappears for more blood work, this time with heated bottles for a specific test.

On cue, at 2 p.m. Lamia collects me for my visual field and eye tomography tests. I'm fascinated with the latter, which uses light waves to take cross-section pictures of the retina. Dr. Nègre sees one minuscule line she doesn't like, perhaps early stages of glaucoma and, as a perfectionist, leads me to take a second round of the non-invasive test. All good.

My day ends at 4 p.m., I am thinking what a seamless experience this has been when Dr. Chironi comes to the suite to give me the overall analysis of my day's results, which is conveniently divided into four files—imaging, consultations, medical syntheses, and prescriptions for further gastro-enterology examinations.

After years of doctors in France scratching their heads and telling me poor circulation is causing my fingers to turn white and that I should consider exercising (between walking my dog, running and swimming I cover 10-25 kilometers a day), Dr. Chironi informs me that it's possible I have Raynaud's disease, and he will arrange for me to meet with a specialist outside the Check-Up Unit to follow-up. Otherwise, I'm in pretty good shape for nearly 50.

For slightly more than the price of two Gala season tickets to the Opera Monte-Carlo (see p. 33), I leave the Princess Grace Check-Up Unit, albeit a few pounds heavier, knowing that I may not have a medical past, but I sure have a healthy future. \*

