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World Health Organization

The question of Medical Tourism

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| Forum: | World Health Organization(WHO) |
| Issue: | The question of Medical Tourism |
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Introduction

Traveling abroad of one's country of residence in order to receive medical treatment is known as medical tourism. Policymakers, researchers, and the media are all taking notice of the rise in medical tourism. The phrase originally refers to patients traveling to developed countries from less developed ones in search of therapies not offered in their native country.

As people move from wealthier to less developed nations to get healthcare, patient mobility is changing both qualitatively and quantitatively today. The relative affordability of treatments in less developed countries, the accessibility of cheap flights, and greater marketing and online consumer information about the availability of medical services all contribute to this change. With the travel industry starting to expand and globalization became prevalent throughout the world, parts of the population, specifically those who could afford to travel frequently, began to travel to different nations in order to receive medical care.

Some of the known main reasons for people receiving treatment through medical tourism is that the country they originally lived in did not have adequate cures for their injuries or illnesses, or they wanted to get better quality treatment. Many people going through the process of medical tourism are also mostly from third-world countries or nations that do not have good quality medical centers, and traveling to a more economically developed nation in order to get the medical treatment they are not able to obtain in their original country.

A multibillion-dollar global phenomenon, medical tourism is anticipated to expand significantly over the next ten years. Cost is the main consideration when deciding whether to acquire medical care overseas for someone who is interested in health services.

Medical tourism has become increasingly popular among businesses and insurance providers as a means of bringing down healthcare costs, which are out of control rising in the US and elsewhere in the world. As more nations throughout the world begin to realize the financial advantages of this developing market, they start to offer quality medical services at noticeably



reduced costs.

The key factor in developing countries' ability to reduce prices for clinics and hospitals is that country's economic standing. One can detect a direct association between income levels and the nation's per capita gross domestic output. As a result, compared to the US, surgery costs in the nations supporting medical tourism are 30% to 70% lower.

Definition of Key Terms

Medical Tourism

Also similar to the concept of Health Tourism, medical tourism is defined by the Oxford dictionary as the action of traveling to a different destination in order to receive medical treatment.

Domestic Health Tourism

The action of traveling to a different country in order to receive dental treatment and care.

Dental Tourism

The action of traveling to a different country in order to receive dental treatment and care.

Reproductive Tourism

Also known as cross-border reproductive care, Reproductive tourism is when someone travels internationally in order to receive fertility treatments.

Transplant

Also known as an organ transplant or a graft, a transplant is when an organ is removed from someone's body and transferred newly into a separate individual's body.

Spa Tourism or Wellness Tourism

Traveling to a different nation in order to receive wellness treatment, undergoing procedures such as hydrotherapy or balneotherapy.



Cosmetic Tourism

When a person travels to another country in order to receive cosmetic procedures elsewhere. This can be part of one's holiday plan, or in order to receive cheaper procedures.

General Overview

It was known that in 2019, the Global medical tourism market was worth and made \$104.68 billion in 2019, and is currently thought to reach approximately \$273 billion by 2027. This shows the market is constantly increasing and is speculated to increase. However, these figures may have been reduced due to the reduction of the travel market with the most recent coronavirus pandemic. There are many known benefits that come with medical tourism. It would be essential for the creation of a solution that can help to revive the business of medical tourism after and during the pandemic for systems to be kept.

From the reduced waiting times for procedures, the current ease to be able to book flights and move around comfortably, to somewhat ensured quality medical treatment patients will receive, and also travel opportunities for patients - especially during times where many people are used to traveling.

However, there is a sense of gap between the rich and the poor with medical traveling. While people from developing countries usually travel to more developed nations to receive treatment, it is hard to apply and go to another nation for the purpose of medical tourism if the individuals are not financially stable to begin with. On the other hand, medical tourism is a useful and accessible source of medical treatment for the rich - who are able to travel easily and without worry with their financial stability.

Technical or mechanical quality and serviceable or functional quality are the two main determinants of service quality in the health care industry. Patients' diagnostic algorithms are based on technical equipment, and the level of functional quality is determined by the services provided by healthcare facilities (such as the services of staffs, nurses and, most importantly, the doctors towards the patient and their assistants). A key factor in luring customers to the medical tourism sector is the level of service provided.

The idea of poor quality is one of the main obstacles to accepting medical tourism. Utilizing

appropriate marketing tactics and quality control via certification from a globally renowned institution are important ways to overcome it. Such certification is essential for boosting trust in the quality

The types of various therapies and their accessibility also have a significant role in the decision to use medical tourism. Elective cosmetic surgery, dental work, organ transplantation, cardiac surgery, and orthopedic surgery are the most popular types of procedures that patients undergo when traveling for medical tourism.

However, a wide range of services, including numerous necessary therapies as well as various forms of conventional and alternative treatments, can be acquired through medical tourism. Traveling abroad for in vitro fertilization, surrogate pregnancies, and other forms of assisted reproductive technology is known as reproductive tourism, sometimes known as reproductive outsourcing.

Access is a significant contributing factor in medical tourism growth in addition to cost. Medical tourism may therefore result from the absence of it, whether because the technology is unavailable or because it is illegal at home. Cytoplasmic transfer and stem cell treatment are typical examples.

Major Parties Involved

World Health Organization (WHO)

Manages the overall healthcare and medical tourism statistics for different nations. They also coordinate and monitor health programmes.

Canada

Canada is known to be one of the best destinations for patients to go in the case of medical tourism - showing the nations support towards the topic.

Singapore

Singapore is another known nation to have high quality medical treatment and is a well known destination for medical tourism.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

The OECDs have been investigating the topic of medical tourism, as well as the implications as OECDs are usually the nations that receive patients through medical tourism.

Timeline of Key Events

| Date | Description of event |
|---------------------|---|
| 1933 | The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) was established as the umbrella organization for medical specialist boards in the United States. The ABMS created educational and professional policies that have since become global standards. |
| 1958 | The European Union of Medical Specialties (UEMS) was established. The UEMS is made up of several National Medical Associations from European Union member countries. |
| 1960s | India became a popular pilgrimage destination when the New Age movement began in the US. |
| 1980s - early 2000s | The flower child movement which drew elite and socialites from America and the United Kingdom, eventually grew into a full-fledged medical tourism industry, with yoga and Ayurvedic medicine rediscovered. |
| 2006 | <p>Patients in the United States began to look for alternatives outside of the country, such as dental services in Central America. During these periods, although US doctors were frightened by the idea of obtaining healthcare in foreign facilities, Cuba began efforts to lure foreigners for eye surgeries, cardiac procedures, and aesthetic procedures. The weakening of Asian currencies prompted government officials in these countries to refocus tourism efforts on positioning their countries as prominent global healthcare destinations. Thailand quickly became a plastic surgery mecca, with prices a fifth of what Western countries could offer.</p> <p>Due to the growth of health providers around the world, Joint Commission International was founded to inspect and probe international healthcare institutions for compliance with international standards.</p> <p>Medical tourism continued its massive growth with as many as 150,000 US Citizens traveling to destinations in Asia and Latin America. Thailand, Singapore, and India had all gained respectability as medical destinations as a result of JCI accreditation. Several Southeast Asian and Latin American countries are expanding as healthcare destinations as a result of JCI accreditation and cooperation with renowned US-based health providers.</p> |

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- National Library of Medicine - Government roles in regulating medical tourism: evidence from Guatemala (PMC6148768)
- The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) - Medical Tourism: Treatments, Markets and Health System Implications: A scoping review

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

There have been creations of medical tourism facilitators. There are many types of services that these facilitators offer, but their main purpose is to assist individuals through the process of medical tourism - from looking through previous medical treatment records to arranging accommodation services. They arrange the procedure of an individual and help manage communication between the patient and the providers of the service that the patient needs. However, it is sometimes hard for individuals to be able to figure out if certain facilitators are trustworthy.

Possible Solutions

- Creation of a system that can manage the medical tourism of all patients and the nations for traveling of the populations.
- Service to connect individuals that need support with choosing and finding reliable medical tourism facilitators that can assist them with their own travels.
- A support system for patients that have to urgently be transported to a different country for treatment, but cannot due to financial constraints or because the nation cannot support the patient/s.
- Creation of a management group that takes charge of the communication between nations that collaborate in terms of the state and transportation of patients that move between nations for the purpose of medical tourism, and communicate the status or condition of patients



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