



Geneva Health Forum 2008

Strengthening Health Systems and the Global Health Workforce

Medical Tourism: Emerging Poles of Excellence

Wednesday 28 May,
14:00-15:30
International Conference Centre Geneva
Room 18

Session Outline

Medical tourism refers to patients who travel abroad in order to consume health services. The motives for going abroad range from higher quality, lower cost, or faster treatment as well as to receive services that are unavailable in their country of residence. Medical travel is often done in combination with the consumption of tourism services. We still lack reliable data to gauge the magnitude of health tourism internationally. However, it is estimated to amount to US\$ 40 billion worldwide (year 2004) with an expected annual growth rate of 20 percent.¹ In 2005, India, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand attracted over 2.5 million health tourists.² The reasons for this fast increase are multiple, such as the increasing demand for health care, the inability of public health care systems to cope with that, and greater access to information on health care services abroad and ease in traveling.

Health Tourism - or Health services delivered to foreign patients that have traveled abroad - offers opportunities and risks for countries (see table).³

Table: *Opportunities and Risks of Health Tourism for Public Health*

Opportunities	Risks
<p><u>For exporting countries:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generate foreign exchange earnings to increase resources for health • reduce brain drain • upgrade health infrastructure, knowledge, standards and quality <p><u>For importing countries:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overcome shortages of physical and human resources in speciality areas • receive more affordable treatment 	<p><u>For exporting countries:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create dual market structure • may crowd out local population - unless these services are available to local population • diversion of resources from the public health system <p><u>For importing countries:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outflow of foreign exchange • difficult follow-up treatment

The overall health policy objective should be to take advantage of the opportunities and mitigate any negative effects of this "trade" to increase the access and quality of health services, as well as to lower costs of health services - especially for the poor and vulnerable groups.

Some questions for discussion:

1. What trade policies by the Ministry of Trade or flanking policies by the MOH can be used to increase the access and quality of health services to the poor and vulnerable populations through an increase in mode 2 of trade in health services.
2. Can health tourism improve public health initiatives ? Through what mechanisms?
3. Should an international accreditation system, international standards be established?
4. Should insurance plans cover medical treatment abroad?
5. Should there be boundaries to the types of health services that are delivered through mode 2?

¹ Top 5 Medical Tourism Destinations, <http://www.nuwireinvestor.com/articles/top-5-medical-tourism-destinations-51502.aspx>, accessed May 13, 2008.

² United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Medical Travel in Asia and the Pacific: Challenges and Opportunities," Bangkok, Thailand, 2008.

³ In the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) health tourism falls under Mode 2, which covers all services that are consumed abroad.

Key Readings (active links are in blue):

- Blouin, C., Drager, N. and R. Smith, (eds.) *International Trade in Health Services and the GATS - Current Issues and Debates*, Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 2006.
- Smith, R., Blouin, C., Drager, N. and D. P. Fidler, "Trade in Health Services and the GATS," in: Mattoo, A., Stern R. M., and G. Zanini, (eds.) *A Handbook of International Trade in Services*, Oxford University Press, 2008.
- MacReady, N., "Developing countries court medical tourists" , *The Lancet*, 369: 1849-50, 2007.
- Milstein, A. and M. Smith, "America's new refugees-seeking affordable surgery offshore," *New England Journal of Medicine*, 355: 1637-40, 2006.
- Horowitz M.D., Rosensweig J. A., Jones C. A. "Medical Tourism: Globalization of the Healthcare Marketplace" *MedGenMed*. 2007; 9(4): 33. Published online 2007 November 13

Other online references:

Medical Tourism: Global Competition in Health Care

<http://www.ncpa.org/pub/st/st304/st304.pdf>

In Pictures: 10 Hospitals Worth The Trip

http://www.forbes.com/2007/05/21/outsourcing-medical-tourism-biz-cx_avd_0522medtourism_slide_2.html

Medical tourism and its impact on our GDP

<http://www.merineews.com/catFull.jsp?articleID=130884>

Medical tourism is waste of resources if poor not treated: Indian Health Secretary said

<http://www.india-forums.com/news/article.asp?id=84718>

Medical Tourism: A Serious Business Undergoing Serious Change

[http://www.law.uh.edu/healthlaw/perspectives/2008/\(BP\)%20med%20tourism.pdf](http://www.law.uh.edu/healthlaw/perspectives/2008/(BP)%20med%20tourism.pdf)

Articles in British Press:

Medical tourism has attracted a great deal of attention in the UK press. Many of them are available following this link:

<http://www.privatehealth.co.uk/hospitaltreatment/treatment-abroad/medical-tourism-articles/>

Books:

Medical Tourism 2008 - The Worldwide Business Guide

http://www.researchandmarkets.com/reportinfo.asp?report_id=569409&t=e&cat_id=

Links to websites:

<http://medicaltourismnewsandviews.blogspot.com>

Articles in french:

Le tourisme médical en pleine expansion, article dans Le Figaro, décembre 2006

http://www.iqmedica.com/prasa/prasa_lefigaro.pdf

Reportage à l'hôpital de Bumrungrad de Bangkok
http://www.lexpress.ch/dossiersactus/sante/art_110705.php

French websites:

Tourisme medical- chirurgie esthétique en Tunisie

http://www.estetikatour.com/tourisme_medical.shtml

Pionniers du tourisme médical en Tunisie

<http://www.dhnet.be/infos/societe/article/206359/pionniers-du-tourisme-medical.html>

Agences de voyage proposant des offres de tourisme médical en Tunisie :

<http://www.carthage-tours.ch/>

Tourisme médical en Europe :

Le tourisme médical en Europe : la santé perd ses frontières
<http://www.newropeans-magazine.org/content/view/6791/50/>

Pologne :

<http://www.iqmedica.com/?v=4>

Swiss perspectives:

Profs et tourisme médical. Editorial du Dr Bertrand Kiefer, éditeur en chef de la Revue Médical Suisse
www.medhyg.ch/formation/article.php3?sid=30649999

L'avenir du marché de la santé en Suisse, présentation ppt de M. Stephan Siegrist, GDI, Département fédéral de l'Intérieur

<http://www.news-service.admin.ch/NSBSubscriber/message/attachments/7314.pdf>

Tourisme médical dentaire : A l'Est, les nouvelles dents sont moins chères, L'Hebdo

<http://www.hebdo.ch/index.cfm?id=1165>

Videos/films:

ABC news

<http://abcnews.go.com/Video/playerIndex?id=2370634>

Conferences:

World Medical Tourism & Global Health Congress

<http://www.medicaltourismcongress.com>

Medical Travel 2008 : Convention & Exhibition 2008 Global Competency In The Gulf Region & Malaysia

<http://www.prlog.org/10061783-medical-travel-2008-convention-exhibition-2008-global-competency-in-the-gulf-region-malaysia.pdf>

International Medical Travel Conference (IMTC) 2008 Korea

<http://www.medicaltravelconference.com/index.php>