



Implications of Medical Tourism

Sandra K. Cesario

ABSTRACT: Medical tourism is an emerging industry that facilitates travel to another country for people who seek medical, surgical, or dental care that is unavailable or more affordable than in their home countries. Rapid advances in electronic communication and the ease of international travel have fueled the growth of this industry. More than half of medical travelers are women, especially for services related to cosmetic or reproductive conditions. Medical tourism creates both opportunities and challenges for nurses and other health care providers. Consumers' increased access to the global health care market necessitates the development of a structure that shapes the medical tourism industry and addresses evolving ethical, political, and human rights concerns related to this industry.

doi: [10.1016/j.nwh.2018.03.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nwh.2018.03.008)

Accepted March 2018

KEYWORDS: health care globalization, medical tourism, medical travel, reproductive care, women's health

It is estimated that nearly 1 million medical tourists from North America seek care in a foreign country, often a lesser-developed country, every year, and this number is expected to grow (Nguyen & Gaines, 2018). Approximately half of medical tourists are women (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Although this is a growing industry, its effects are largely unknown and hotly contested in the health care community, given the potential for unregulated and inequitable global health care delivery (Johnston, Crooks, Snyder, & Kingsbury, 2010).

Definitions

Medical tourism is defined as an emerging industry to help people who reside in one country travel to another country to seek medical, surgical, or dental care. Treatment can be considered obligatory, meaning that treatment is required to manage a life-threatening condition, or it may be elective, meaning that it is dependent on personal preferences or desires. In some cases, the treatment might be unavailable or illegal in the home country or optionally available more quickly or cost effectively elsewhere (Jones & Keith, 2006). *Health or*

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Medical tourism is a rapidly growing industry fueled by rapid advances in electronic communication and the ease of international travel.
- The most commonly cited reasons for medical tourism are affordability, accessibility, and acceptable quality.
- Emerging companies are hiring nurse case managers to aid medical tourists seeking health care services in foreign countries.
- Nurses can play a key role in shaping policies and laws associated with an industry that is fraught with quality, safety, and ethical issues.

wellness tourism is a broader term that includes travel to another country for preventive or rehabilitative health reasons that incorporate rest, exercise, weight management, cleansing, diet, and use of herbs. *Domestic medical tourism* is yet another related term and refers to individuals who travel to a different city or region within the same country to receive what they perceive as superior or less expensive care than they have access to in their home city.

Every year, approximately 1 million medical tourists from North America seek care in a foreign country, often a lesser-developed country, and this number is expected to grow

Driving Forces

Many factors drive a person's decision to seek health care outside the United States. Rapid advances in electronic communication and ease of international travel have facilitated growth of the medical tourism industry. Internet technology has opened the door for connecting potential medical travelers with health care providers almost anywhere in the world. Once a connection has been made, an intricate and well-developed system of air travel allows individuals to reach even remote destinations in a matter of hours.

The most commonly cited reasons for engaging in medical tourism are affordability, accessibility, and acceptable quality. Procedures, treatments, and pharmaceuticals may be 40% to 90% less expensive than what is available in the United States (Dalstrom, 2013; Eissler & Casken, 2013). Decreased cost

Sandra K. Cesario, PhD, RNC, FAAN, is the PhD/DNP Program Coordinator in the College of Nursing at Texas Woman's University in Houston, TX. The author reports no conflicts of interest or relevant financial relationships. Address correspondence to: scsario@twu.edu.



can, however, be associated with less stringent regulation and quality monitoring, thereby compromising safety. Some prospective medical tourists may be seeking procedures, therapies, or medications not available to them in the United States because of lack of insurance, lack of U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval, or long wait times for surgical procedures (Hopkins, Labonte, Runnels, & Packer, 2010; Runnels et al., 2014). Immigrants also contribute to the number of medical tourists from the United States, because they may prefer to return to their home countries for health care or traditional medicine. In addition, governments and insurers may “outsource” individuals through contractual arrangements with institutions in other countries for treatment at their health care facilities (Whittaker, 2015, p. 486).

Commonly Treated Conditions

The most common conditions for which women seek care outside the United States are cosmetic surgery, bariatric procedures, treatment for women's cancers, and reproductive health procedures such as abortion and fertility treatment. Dentistry, organ transplantation, orthopedic and spine surgery, cardiac surgeries, and LASIK procedures are common conditions sought by men and women. However, any type of health care can be accessed via medical tourism including but not limited to mental health programs, complementary and alternative medicine, rehabilitation, hospice care, and burial services.

Of those traveling abroad to seek cosmetic surgery, approximately 91% are females between the ages of 40 and 54 years. The most common procedures sought are breast augmentation, abdominoplasty, liposuction, bariatric surgery, and facial reconstruction (nose reshaping, eyelid surgery, and facelifts; American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2018). Cosmetic surgery tourism is frequently marketed as all-inclusive vacation packages that include recovery in a luxury setting. Although insurance does not cover these vacation/surgery packages, the major selling point is the low cost of the entire

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/8564539>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/8564539>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)