

## Medical Tourism: Now and Future

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Amidst the globalization, medical tourism has become a new economic force of the tourism industry, with its revenue increasing by 2 billion USD annually in the world [1]. The whole wave of medical tourism started from North America [2-3], but the rising medical costs [4] is a great challenge to the industry [5]. Like many other industries, Asia Market has become another important niche in medical tourism. With visions and support from the governments, some Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand have successfully set up exemplars of sustainable model to improve their own medical infrastructures with the revenue from medical tourism [6-8]. Nevertheless, some Asian countries are relatively less initiative in developing medical tourism due to language and cultural differences [9].

Medical tourism is criticized by some scholars for its negative effects on local medical system [10-11], social ethics [12] and inequality of medical care in the world [13]. Another major concern of medical tourism is the quality of medical services actually provided to the end-users i.e. patients, which hinges on a robust monitoring system of medical tourism companies by the local governments [14]. Clear guidelines and accreditations are no doubt the core of these monitoring mechanisms. The American Medical Association has issued guidelines for medical professionals practicing in the medical tourism industry in 2008 [15]. Under the guideline, stack-holders including patients, employers, insurers and medical travel coordinators were reminded of their rights and responsibilities when involving in medical tourism industry activities. However, similar guidelines were not available in many other countries providing medical tours. The road of translating the guidelines to legal statements is still long in the near future. At the same time, the progress of international healthcare accreditations may not be able to match the rapid growth of medical tourism industries in most of the Asian countries.

Indeed, medical tourism should not be regarded as a route to outsource the medical services across the country borders [16]. Furthermore, the impact of medical tourism on the health care provision in third world counties should not be neglected [17]. To answer the question, whether medical services should be a core or a value adding component of local tourism, is still awaiting more scientific evidence. Specific and new topics such as cosmetic surgery tourism and reproductive tourism also need to be addressed with more comprehensive research from an interdisciplinary perspective, including medicine, economics, tourism and hospitality, and sociology. To conclude, medical tourism is more than a personal decision of medical services in this new era.

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