

Health Tourism Inclined Toward Obtaining Accreditation

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Context: In this study, it is tried to present a definition and description of health tourism as well as illustrating the essential infrastructures and the impacts of accreditation.

Evidence Acquisition: In this article, the related articles in websites and libraries were inspected and then the relevant ones that had more association with this subject were chosen and their contents were extracted.

Results: Implementation of international accreditation standards has a significant effect on absorbing medical tourism and removes much of the dangers and disadvantages of medical tourism.

Conclusions: Since International Accreditation Standards have clearly stated all processes and organizations are required to implement them, obtaining the relevant licenses can ensure health tourist that they have selected the right country and the right hospital to access their desired medical services.

Keywords: Accreditation; Hospital; Medical Tourism

1. Context

Tourism is an economic activity which thanks to its specific nature and characteristics has provided nations with the opportunity to enter the arena of international trade regardless of their level of development. As such, this economic activity, which basically falls within service sector, is seen as an industry and which constitutes the world's third-largest industry after oil and automotive industries (1). In 2007, about 43 thousand to 103 thousand tourists visited United States for treatment (2). Currently, about 500 thousand Americans go to other countries to seek low-cost medical treatments and access various medical procedures. This large number of health tourists is mainly due to the high cost of health care in medical system of United States (3). Obviously, there are many different justifications for the provision of such health care and several categories have been presented in this regard, e.g. people who solely travel to access basic and advanced care services and people who require health care during their trip. Also, immigrant's travelling in search of employment may need health care services too. For this reason, many countries in the world have offered a wide range of quality medical services at various costs (4) and it is difficult to pinpoint a country that exclusively offers the best medical services in the world (5) although countries such as Germany, United States and the Netherlands are known as

the leading centers in the reception of health tourists; whereas, countries like United States, Czech and Slovak are the largest dispatcher of patients to other countries (6). Overall, health tourism is driven by a host of factors including the lack of proper insurance coverage. United States with 45 million people without any insurance coverage is one of the leading countries of the world in this regard (5). A group of health tourists look for new technologies, with new studies showing that 32% of people seek improved health care and 15% pursue prompt health care without a waiting list (7). Given the importance of tourism in the world, especially the benefits of health tourism, Iran as a country that offers affordable medical services should pay special attention to this subject. It requires a comprehensive analysis of various dimensions of this matter. To this purpose, this paper offers a review of studies in this field.

2. Evidence Acquisition

The relevant materials were searched in library resources and Internet databases and articles that were more pertinent to the subject were extracted and examined. Moreover, Internet databases such as Google scholar, Prequest, Elsevier, Magiran and SID were investigated using key words such as health tourism, accreditation, and medical travel along with various combinations of these terms in both English and Farsi.

3. Results

The results showed that the presence of a waiting list, high costs, lack of insurance coverage (5, 8), poor health care (8) illegality of some medical activities in some countries (5, 9, 10), lack of modern medical equipment and specialized personnel and long distances (4) were among the major drives of health tourism. Health tourists also face several problems during the use of medical services including the lack of face to face communication between physicians and patients prior to the surgery as well as the emergence of postoperative complications such as pain, thrombosis, acute pulmonary edema, impaired consciousness, dehydration and fatigue (2, 5). Also, given the improper health conditions, the use of medical services in some developing countries increases the risk of infections such as malaria and tuberculosis (2). In the event of such complications, the treatment would be difficult and costly and in some countries patients have to pay these extra costs (5). In these cases, insurance coverage is necessary. Sometimes cultural and language barriers hinder proper communications (2). On the other hand, some countries may adopt methods and equipment that are not approved. In some cases, patients are subject to medical errors, but since patient's records are not registered in most countries, these cases cannot be sued and even when the records are available, the long distance makes it practically impossible (2). In general, it seems that patients and tourists are more likely to go to countries where these problems are resolved or alleviated (5). Thus, countries that intend to invest on health tourism should seek regulations and standards that can eliminate these problems to a large degree. Nowadays, there are organizations such as ACI and JCI which are responsible for homogenizing and ensuring the provision of quality of medical services. These two organizations develop international standards or accreditations that are applicable to different cultures and customs in all countries (11). Therefore, obtaining the license and authorizations from each of these organizations and following their procedures can contribute to the elimination of health tourism problems. Given the remarkable difference between the cost of dental procedures or surgery in Iran and other countries, as shown in Figure 1, 2, and 3, and considering that Iran is one of the few developing countries that has been managed to obtain ACI license, this country needs to take more serious steps in the field of health tourism.

4. Conclusions

It is clear that health tourism industry should have all necessary factors such as the provision of medical services, tourism attractions and travel, establishment of government relationships and so on (12). Since International Accreditation Standards have clearly stated all processes and organizations are required to implement them, obtaining the relevant licenses can ensure health tourists that they have selected the right country and the right hospital to access their desired medical services.

The comparison of costs of dental procedures in different countries (in U.S.\$)

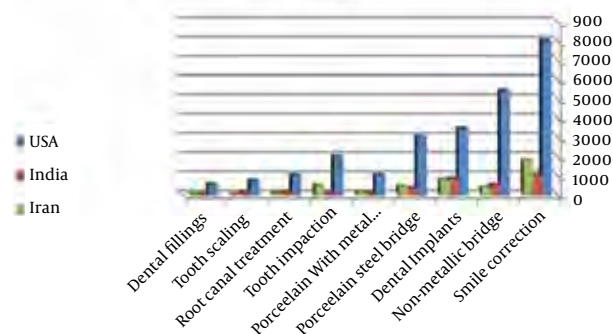


Figure 1. Cost of Dental Treatment in Different Countries (Prices are in USD)

The comparison of costs of cosmetic surgery in different countries (in U.S. \$)

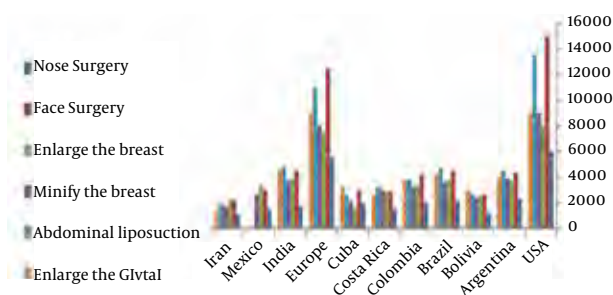


Figure 2. Comparison of the Cost of Cosmetic Surgery in Different Countries (Prices are in USD)

The comparison of costs of surgery in different countries (in U.S. \$)

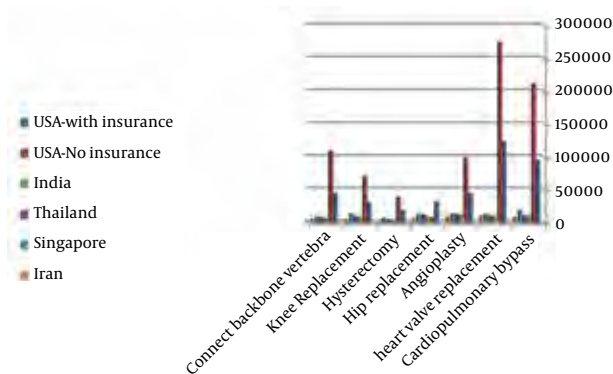


Figure 3. Cost of Surgeries in Selected Countries (Prices Are in USD)

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Authors' Contributions

Zahra Mojarradi: doing and supervision of the study and data acquisition; Somaye Beikzadeh: data Acquisition and translating; Mahdieh Milani: data acquisition; Saeideh Amouzegar: doing and supervision of the study, data acquisition and writing the manuscript Azra Izanloo: doing and supervision of the study and editing the manuscript; Ghafour Khoramehr: doing and supervision of the study.

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