The 14th Economic International Conference: Strategies and Development Policies of Territories: International, Country, Region, City, Location Challenges | May 10-11, 2018 | Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Romania

Strategies and Development Policies of Territories: International, Country, Region, City, Location Challenges

Trends in Medical Tourism in the Context of Globalization

Gabriela-Liliana CIOBAN, Costel-Ioan CIOBAN,
Alexandru-Mircea NEDELEA

<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.76>

How to cite: Cioban, G.-L., Cioban, C.-I., Nedelea, A.-M. (2018). Trends in Medical Tourism in the Context of Globalization. In C. Năstase (ed.), *The 14th Economic International Conference: Strategies and Development Policies of Territories: International, Country, Region, City, Location Challenges | May 10-11, 2018 | Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Romania* (pp. 229-240). Iasi, Romania: LUMEN Proceedings. <https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.76>

Trends in Medical Tourism in the Context of Globalization

Gabriela-Liliana CIOBAN¹, Costel-Ioan CIOBAN^{2*},
Alexandru-Mircea NEDELEA³

Abstract

Medical tourism is a phenomenon that has been manifested for thousands of years and is now defined by the need of patients from the developed countries to obtain care and medical services combined with certain tourist facilities. Specialty literature emphasizes that this concept is used to designate a journey whose motivation involves a medical procedure or activities that promote the physical and mental well-being of man. The growing presence of patients from the high-income countries in countries with emerging economies and developing economies is explained by the fact that these countries provide high-quality medical services at low costs (a phenomenon known as medical outsourcing). Increasing the flow of patients seeking treatments abroad is a global phenomenon, linked to economic development that generates income growth and education. Tourism is and must become a profitable business, we must struggle with us and with the competition of other international tourism operators to promote our national values and also to gain a recognized position and increase our profits. The medical tourism market is growing worldwide, and it is estimated at around \$ 100 billion. This study attempts to highlight a conceptual analysis of medical tourism, the trends of medical tourism flows possible development strategies of medical tourism, the medical tourism market, the implications of medical tourism on the economy and health systems, as well as the problems faced by medical tourism.

¹ Faculty of Economic and Public Administration, Suceava, Romania, gabicioban@gmail.com.

² Faculty of Economic and Public Administration, Suceava, Romania, alnedealea@yahoo.com.

³ Faculty of Economic and Public Administration, Suceava, Romania,
costel.cioban@gmail.com.

<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.76>

Corresponding Author: Costel-Ioan CIOBAN

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of the conference

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited

Keywords:

Medical tourism, treatments, medical services, tourist packages, the medical tourism market, quality of medical services.

1. Introduction

Medical tourism is a branch of health care tourism, along with the treatment tourism and wellness (reviving, relaxing in the jacuzzi, spoiling in honey packs, personalized diets, organic food, swimming, sauna, fitness, massage etc.; can be hydrotherapy, homeopathy, beauty treatments and anti-aging; to prevent a medical problem) tourism. These forms of tourism have developed as a result of people's needs to obtain care and medical services combined with certain tourist facilities [21].

Medical tourism consists of trips made by people who wish to acquire and benefit from various specialized medical services (aesthetic surgery, heart surgery, dental services, etc.) outside their usual residence. [3]

Nomenclatures used in specialized literature defines medical tourism as international medical services involving a journey [4], [5], abroad outsourcing of medical services [8], medical refugees [10] and even biotechnological pilgrims [11].

In the same context, we specify that medical tourism has grown as a result of an increase in the flow of patients seeking treatments abroad. This phenomenon is manifested globally and is related to economic development that generates income growth and education.

Tourism is and must become a profitable business, we must struggle with us and with the competition of other international tourism operators to promote our national values and also to gain a recognized position and increase our profits [1], [23].

Historically speaking, medical tourism (health tourism) dates back thousands of years (about 2000 years), since the pilgrims were traveling from the Mediterranean Sea to Epidaurus in the Peloponnese, being considered the birthplace and sanctuary of the God of Health, Asklepios, son of Apollo. In the same context, it is stated that the Persians used steam and mud baths and knew about the effects of baths in the Dead Sea.

Medical tourism has grown because of the richer supply of medical services quality at low prices. Patients benefiting from these medical services come from industrialized countries where increased health care costs have helped to increase patients' availability to move to high-quality medical services in emerging and developing economies. The desire to maintain health is, therefore, leading to travels with the aim of consumption of

advanced health services. In the same context, healthcare professionals have defined medical tourism as "spending leisure time for restoring health, not considering the suffering of patients" [9] or "Activities related to a person who often travels long distances across the country border to benefit from medical services with direct or indirect involvement in leisure time" [6] or "Patients traveling abroad to receive medical treatment or periodic medical examinations" [7] etc.

All these arguments have forced the specialists in the field to identify the attributions of the medical tourism and to confirm its involvement in the improvement of the quality of life.

This is possible also due to the fact that the medical tourism has advantages such as: eliminating the effects of seasonality ("Health tourism is the only form of tourism that is not affected by seasonality.") At the NTA level, our concerns are both to promote health tourism through an organization of documentary visits, participation in fairs and other marketing tools, as well as the initiation of legislative proposals in the field. As central authority we are involved in giving credibility to Romania as a destination for health tourism, which is also possible thanks to the collaboration with private sector, by increasing the quality of the services offered to the tourists on this segment" [Speech at the opening of the International Tourism Tourism Forum (2014) by Răzvan Filipescu, President of the National Authority for Tourism (NAT)], the existence of some prestigious medical and balneal facilities, modern reception facilities, highly qualified staff in the field of medicine as well as the hospitality industry, etc.

Finally, I can say that the satisfaction felt by individuals during the practice of tourism materializes in an improved quality of life, defined by a more pleasant life, based on social welfare, social protection and social progress [2].

2. Research Methodology

The research methodology focuses on the identification of specialized literature in the field of medical tourism, on the analysis of the factors influencing the demand and supply in the field of medical tourism, the effects of the medical tourism development on the economy, as well as the problems faced by the medical tourism at the moment.

The decision to use this information was taken in order to achieve a conceptual framework that would be useful to decision-makers in this sector.

3. The Evolution of Medical Tourism

The statistical data of recent years show an evolution of medical tourism materialized in a high demand from those with financial possibilities and with various medical conditions. Other reasons that lead to this type of tourism are found in Figure no.1 [20]:

Figure no.1. Reasons that lead to the emergence of medical tourism.
Source: Personal creation

All these have led over time to the increase in the size of this form of tourism through which patient-tourists can benefit of hotel accommodation and other services included, in addition to treatment in the clinic, which can be ambulatory. All these aspects are made through tourism agencies specialized in health tourism.

We specify that the medical offer is varied and consists of treatments such as cosmetics and beauty; cosmetic surgery; drug, smoking or alcohol detoxification; dentistry; treatments for weight loss, including liposuction; complicated diseases and sometimes rare; oncological treatments and diagnostics; orthopedic and cardiology services; treating burns and those who have suffered from them; services provided in preventive medicine; plastic surgery; ophthalmic services; surgery etc.

Countries that provide quality medical services and luxury conditions for patients who can afford or have a complex health insurance are spread all over the world.

Depending on the number of tourists-patients who visited these countries to treat various diseases, a ranking of the top 10 countries was made: Thailand ranks first, followed by Mexico, the United States, Singapore, India, Malaysia, Brazil, Turkey, Taiwan and Costa Rica [15].

Another ranking made by Numbeo at the level of European countries is about the level of doctors' training, the speed of medical interventions and the cost of procedures. This ranking was made through the feedback received on the platform created by programmer Mladen Adamovic, from patients who received healthcare in Europe.

According to this study, France ranks first, and Romania is at the end of the ranking with 46.57 points (Table 1 - Top of the best healthcare countries in Europe), while countries like Albania, Bulgaria or Montenegro record a better score on the quality of healthcare provided to their citizens [22].

Table no. 1 – Top of the best healthcare countries in Europe

No.	Country	Number of points	No.	Country	Number of points
1.	FRANCE	82,58	21.	SWITZERLAND	66,31
2.	MALTA	82,18	22.	ITALY	65,78
3.	DENMARK	79,28	23.	PORTUGAL	65,62
4.	AUSTRIA	78,42	24.	BULGARIA	58,47
5.	CYPRUS	78,36	25.	ICELAND	58,43
6.	BELGIUM	77,86	26.	POLAND	58,03
7.	SWEDEN	76,29	27.	SLOVAKIA	57,34
8.	LUXEMBOURG	76,11	28.	CROAȚIA	57,26
9.	GERMANY	75,61	29.	GREECE	56,73
10.	NORWAY	75,46	30.	SERBIA	54,12
11.	TURKEY	74,00	31.	SLOVENIA	53,93
12.	GREAT BRITAIN	73,88	32.	MOLDOVA	52,69
13.	SPAIN	73,21	33.	BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA	52,08
14.	ESTONIA	73,08	34.	RUSSIA	51,08
15.	LITHUANIA	70,11	35.	HUNGARY	51,88
16.	FINLAND	69,38	36.	IRELAND	49,53
17.	ALBANIA	67,41	37.	ROMANIA	46,57
18.	CZECH REPUBLIC	67,24	38.	BELARUS	45,39
19.	NETHERLANDS	67,23	39.	UKRAINE	44,27
20.	LITHUANIA	67,13	40.	MACEDONIA	35,12

Source of the table: NUMBEO/ Business Insider

www.zf.ro/zf-24/topul-tarilor-cu-cele-mai-bune-servicii-medicale-din-europa-pe-ce-loc-e-romania-13784786 accessed 18.10.2017

According to the Euro Health Consumer Index 2017 Report, it is noticed that the Nordic countries offer quality health care services, ranking first, while Romania recorded for the second consecutive year a decrease in the quality of medical services. If in 2015 Romania occupies the 32nd place, in 2016 occupies the 35th place with a total score of 497 points (out of 1,000 points) and in 2017 occupies the penultimate place (34th place) with 439 points.

The report analyzes a total of 48 relevant indicators for the performance of the medical system, as well as patient rights and information,

access to medical services, treatment outcomes, the diversity and complexity of medical services, the prevention and use of medicines, and the efficiency of spending public money.

Compared with the other countries analyzed in the report, Romania is the only country to score less than 500 except Cyprus, a country that is difficult to assess by EHCI. Please note that Cyprus does not have a public healthcare system equivalent to the European one.

Also, Bulgaria (548 points) and Greece (569 points) achieved significantly better scores than Romania. (Chart no. 1)

Chart no.1 Total score Euro Health Consumer 2017

Source: www.healthpowerhouse.com/media/EHCI-2017/EHCI-2017-report.pdf, page 27
www.healthpowerhouse.com/ [17]

The Euro Health Consumer Index 2017 Report shows that Romania also ranks last in terms of the efficiency of money spent on medical services, following Ireland and Greece. The Romanian medical system has an outdated health structure with a high and expensive ratio between hospitalized and non-hospitalized treatment. In this context, it is estimated in the report that Romanians, Bulgarians, and Albanians need professional assistance in order to restructure health services. (Chart no. 2)

capita than Latvia, Montenegro, the Republic of Macedonia and Albania. (Chart no. 3)

Chart no.3 The cost of health care per capita in PPP dollars were taken from the HFA database of WHO

Source: <https://healthpowerhouse.com/media/EHCI-2017/EHCI-2017-report.pdf> pag.31

Regarding the number of doctors per 100,000 inhabitants, Romania is on the last places before the countries of Montenegro, Poland and Albania, although it is much better at waiting time for emergency services, where it is on the 9th place (according to a survey by national authorities in 2013 [21]). (Chart no.4)

Chart no. 4 Doctors at 100,000 people (long bars) and the number of doctors named per capita (short bars).

Source: www.healthpowerhouse.com/media/EHCI-2017/EHCI-2017-report.pdf pag.43

Given the recent cases, it is no wonder that Romania also ranks first when it comes to the frequency of intra-hospital infections (according to a 2014 survey), while northern countries occupy the last places with a percentage of 0.01 % . The situation of the Romanian health system is even more worrying as our country is on the 10th place at the budget allocation of health funds, with 80% of the funding being made from budgetary allocations in the entire health system. (Chart no. 5)

Chart no.5 Frequency of intra-hospital infections

Source: www.healthpowerhouse.com/media/EHCI-2017/EHCI-2017-report.pdf pag.58

The state of the healthcare system in Europe is recording an evolution in terms of treatment outcomes, healthcare performance, patient/consumer position, but requires improvements in accessibility, medical procedures, etc.

These situations lead to the development of medical tourism, intercultural development and, last but not least, to the increase of comfort and health.

4. Aspects of Medical Tourism in Romania

In We find that in the last decade the effect of medical tourism is felt in our country as well, both in terms of increasing the quality of the medical act for certain diseases and also in increasing the number of tourists-patients who require and benefit from the medical services provided by the Romanian clinics [19].

This is primarily due to the aging of the population, the high treatment price in some developed countries, the unavailability of effective treatments in developing countries, etc. It follows that the existence of highly trained doctors, cheap labor, "prices are unbeatable", latest technologies, waiting lists are not long-term, and the quality of the medical act in private clinics in our country motivate tens of thousands of strangers to come and treat here.

We underline that the type of medical services that foreigners can benefit from in our country has been continuously diversified. In this regard, we talk about dental services, esthetic services (which have remained the most accessible), services for difficult ophthalmologic interventions, obesity or even tumor removal as well as in vitro fertilization. These medical services are offered in the major cities of our country, such as Bucharest, Cluj, Brasov, and Timisoara, and are of interest to foreign patients as long as they continue to pay about 40% less than in their home countries. The

easiest to access is Bucharest because it can be reached by plane from anywhere in the world [14].

Romania's tourism potential is high but not sufficiently promoted. Increasing the number of healthcare consumers tourists, as well as aligning with countries such as Austria, Turkey, Germany or Greece, is a priority for Romania if we consider the fact that medical tourism is open 12 months a year and is considered as niche tourism.

The presence of some associations and organizations in the field of tourism, which have international connections and aim to coagulate the interests of some hospitals, clinics, medical providers, travel agencies or insurance companies, contribute to the development of medical tourism in our country. In Romania, the Romanian Association of Medical Tourism (an association of more than 130 private clinics and hospitals in Romania) is an association that aims to make known the quality and attractive prices of Romanian medical services (Figure 2).

Figure no.2. The mission of the Romanian Medical Tourism Association

Source: processed after www.artm.ro/misiunea-noastra [12]

The strategies for promoting and transmitting information in as many places as possible in the world are: workshops, doctors meetings, medical presentations, doctors congresses, medical tourism fairs participations, publishing a guide - Romanian Medical Tourism Guide [13] about the clinics and hospitals in the major Romanian cities providing dedicated medical treatments to foreign patients, as well as the tourist

attractions, accommodation capacities, and specific activities to the chosen area.

In order to provide complex services dedicated to foreign patients and not only, it is necessary to build tourist programs that diversify the possibilities for relaxation, recreation and leisure. The construction of such tourist programs [18] is necessary because they influence the medical tourism - which is a very advantageous tourism niche with a very high added value. The medical tourism market in Romania is dominated by the demand for spa and wellness services, and the company (specialized in medical tourism) Seytour estimates that this market exceeds 300 million euros.

Forecasts for medical tourism are positive, Insight Market Research Solutions believes that the value of the medical tourism market in Romania could double. The success of the medical tourism market would be based on the reputation of Romanian doctors who have worked in the largest hospitals in the world and the attractiveness of tourist packages offered by medical tourism companies.

In the same context, we state that the Romanian becomes a second actor on the medical tourism market. The Ministry of Health wants to create tourist packages that contain both medical services and sightseeing of tourist attractions. Therefore, medical tourism is a business for the Romanian state, and for its development, it is necessary to promote the tourist packages offered to the patients from abroad. Romanian authorities should take into account the fact that there is a demand for medical services offered by specialized institutions in our country, and the profit from medical tourism could increase if all-inclusive medical tourism packages were better promoted.

5. Conclusions

In recent years, we have witnessed the development of medical tourism in Western Europe and also in Romania. The arguments of this theory relate to the information that highlights the fact that European public health services continue to improve, the ratio of the money spent and the performance of healthcare is very good, the statistical data in the health sector contribute to the improvement of the medical procedures at European level, the continuing professional training of both doctors and hospital managers contributes to the reform of health systems.

The results of the Euro Health Consumer Index report show an evolution of the healthcare system characterized for some countries such as Slovakia by improving access to treatment, and for other countries such as

Macedonia and Montenegro through eliminating the patient's waiting time due to the use of e-health. E-health, a process defined by the major impact of digital technology on everyday life, through the passage of some medical services, some facilities and ways of health surveillance into the digital, virtual environment, connected to the Internet. This process/mechanism is explained by the ability to accumulate, process and use a large amount of medical data, a situation that will radically change this area, providing access to better, less expensive and more effective health services.

Finally, we can conclude that medical tourism is becoming the most emerging international business, is a growing phenomenon that involves both economic and social benefits, but also certain risks. For countries providing health care services for foreign patients, there is a secure foreign currency entry and less migration of healthcare workers in other countries, and in countries from where the patient-tourists come, the benefits are defined by lower costs and low waiting lists.

I also believe that an accredited organization needs to be set up to develop a common basis for regulation to ensure better transparency of the quality of healthcare services around the world.

Involving governments in delivering successful marketing strategies in medical tourism is indispensable due to the globalization that has turned tourism from a seasonal activity into an activity of need.

References

- [1] Cioban G.-L. GLOBALIZAREA, UNIUNEA EUROPEANĂ ȘI TURISMUL. Revista de Turism studii și cercetări în turism. 2007; 3: (27). Retrieved from: www.revistadeturism.ro/rdt/article/view/230
- [2] Cioban G.-L., Slusariuc G. C. THE EFFECT OF LEISURE TIME ON TOURISTIC RESOURCES AND ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE, Revista Ecoforum 3. 2014; 1(4), Retrieved from: <http://www.ecoforumjournal.ro/index.php/eco/article/view/91>
- [3] Cocean R., Moiescu O. I. Toader V. Economie și planificare strategică în turism, Editura Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca; 2014.
- [4] Crozier, G. K. D., Baylis, F. The ethical physician encounters international medical travel. Journal of Medical Ethics. 2014; (36): 297-301
- [5] Fedorov G., Tata S., Raveslooy, B., Dhakal G., Kanosue, Y. & Roncarati, M. (2009), Medical Travel in Asia and the Pacific: challenges and opportunities. Bangkok: UN ESCAP.
- [6] Jagyasi P. Medical Tourism Blue. Medical Tourism Magazine; 2009: 310.

- [7] Yap J., Chen S.S., Nones N. Medical tourism: The Asian chapter Singapore Deloitte; 2008.
- [8] Jones C. A. & Keith L. G. Medical tourism and reproductive outsourcing: The dawning of a new paradigm for healthcare. *International Journal of Fertility and Women's Medicine*. 2006 51(6): 251-5.
- [9] Kangas B. Traveling for Medical Care in a Global World. *Medical Anthropology: Cross-Cultural Studies in Health and Illness*; 2010: 29.
- [10] Milstein A., Smith, M. America's New Refugees - Seeking Affordable Surgery Offshore. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2006; 355: 1637-1640.
- [11] Song, P. Biotech Pilgrims and the Transnational Quest for Stem Cell Cures. *Medical Anthropology: Cross-Cultural Studies in Health and Illness*. 2010; 29: 384-402.
- [12] www.artm.ro/misiunea-noastra
- [13] www.artm.ro/promovare-membri
- [14] www.capital.ro/turismul-medical-in-europa-si-avantajul.html
- [15] www.destepti.ro/cele-mai-cautate-destinatii-pentru-turism-medical-din-lume
- [16] www.healthpowerhouse.com/media/EHCI-2017/EHCI-2017-report.pdf page 27
- [17] www.intermedline.com/ro/blog/turism-medical-furnizori-de-ce-intermedline/
- [18] www.cdep.ro/proiecte/2017/000/00/7/59.pdf
- [19] www.povestidecalatorie.ro/turismul-de-sanatate-o-necesitate-sau-un-moft/
- [20] www.profit.ro/stiri/raport-romania-are-cel-mai-prost-sistem-de-sanatate-din-35-de-tari-europene-si-albania-are-servicii-medicale-mai-bune-16600770
- [21] www.turismuldesanatate.ro/turismul-wellness-sau-ex-ante/
- [22] www.zf.ro/zf-24/topul-tarilor-cu-cele-mai-bune-servicii-medicale-din-europa-pe-ce-loc-e-romania-13784786 accesat 18.10.2017
- [23] www.revistadeturism.ro/rdt/article/view/230