

## MEDICAL TOURISM: PROBLEMS AND POTENTIALS OF UZBEKISTAN

SCHOLASTICO-2021

Omonova Nilufar.

Master Degree in Tourism Department

Hamroev H.R.

Candidate of Economic Sciences



### Abstract

**Introduction:** The article gives some measures and clear understanding of Medical Tourism and its prospects and obstacles in Uzbekistan. It begins with definition to the term health tourism and moves on to the country's current attempts to improve the branch. Furthermore, here are some attributes to describe this type of tourism that has already become one of the most lucrative and attractive kinds of tourism. There are some criteria that fulfill medical tourism industry which may be involved by the patients all over the world.

**Results:** After a thorough investigation on several articles and scientific research papers, we have identified a clear definition for medical tourism. This has led to look into the prospective aspects of Uzbekistan in developing the field and the major problems that the country is facing.

**Conclusion:** Medical tourism is an opportunity for a developing country as Uzbekistan that should take advantage of the favorable international context and invest in creating and promoting a competitive medical touristic offer. We have found that the growth of a medical tourism destination is influenced by the superior economical level of the receiving countries, but, at the same time, it is also a growth factor for developing economies if it is included in their national strategy.

### Key words:

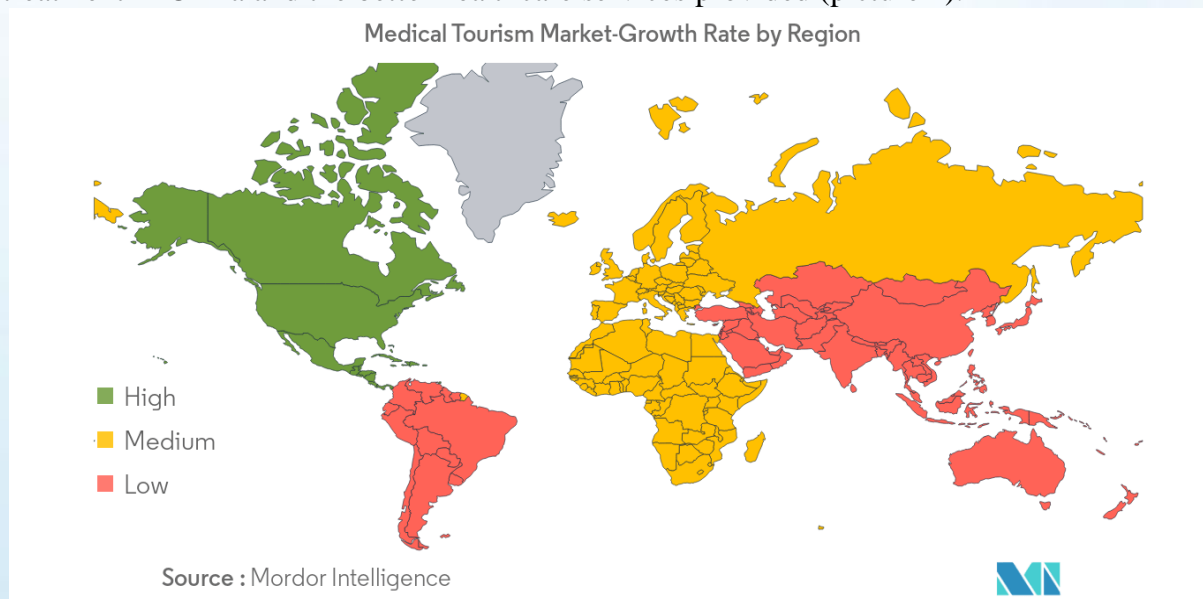
Medical tourism, electronic health record, economic position, sustainable development

### Definition

Medical tourism has emerged as an industry due to improved health technology, decreased cost for transportation, and innovative information technology. In accordance with tourism segment classification depending on journey reasons recommended by World Health Organization (WHO), one of the main groups is for 'medical treatment/health'. Being part of health tourism, medical tourism is often called medical travel because it includes the act of travelling to different countries for medical reasons. An increasing significant element in medical service trade is patient circulation at cross-border level with a view to obtaining necessary health services; this circulation generated a new phenomenon, namely medical tourism. A study published in the American Journal of Medicine revealed that the number of medical tourists to all countries in 2017 was estimated at 14-16 million. Now that we know this, we simply have to find their average spend to know the true value of the industry. Foreign patients can actually spend up to \$6,000 on each trip, bringing the total amount of money generated up to \$72 billion.<sup>1</sup>The ongoing increase in medical travel flow brings both opportunities and challenges for the health care industry. Health tourism as one of the aspects of tourism helps sustainable development and the dynamism in a country. Due to the low cost and high revenue of this industry, many developing countries focused their attention on this part of the industry. As is shown on the graph below, the Asia-Pacific region currently dominates the medical tourism market and it is

<sup>1</sup><https://www.health-tourism.com/medical-tourism/statistics>

expected to continue its stronghold for a few more years. This region is expected to increase its market share in the future, owing to the raised preference of medical tourism across the developing countries of this region. China holds the majority of the market in the Asia-Pacific region. This is due to the lower cost of the treatment in China and the better healthcare services provided (picture 1).



Picture 1. Medical Tourism Market-Growth Rate by Region

Uzbekistan can be very successful in attracting patients from other countries, because it has many advantages and strengths such as various specialty and subspecialty centers, relatively low costs, natural resources, cultural and language similarities with some neighboring countries.

## Potentials

Medical tourism market will be highly competitive in the near future. Easy access to new technologies and modern medical equipment, development of information and communication technologies and investment in infrastructure can be considered among the factors that have led to intensified competition in this market.

Concerning that an important part of health issues related to medical interventions, mainly hospital services, hospitals can play an active role in health tourism industry. The reason is that these organizations around the world can be an effective factor for medical tourists to select their destination due to quality problems and cost of services in their own countries. Patient satisfaction with the medical tourism is also a critical indicator of health care quality and predict patients' intention of revisiting. Medical tourists seek quality in their interaction with health care providers in the destination hospital. Employee's responsibility and attitude, tourists' perceived value, and other factors such as environment, food, and communication shape their own understanding of health care quality and thereby influence their experience. In addition, medical tourists divided health care quality into medical and service qualities.<sup>3</sup>

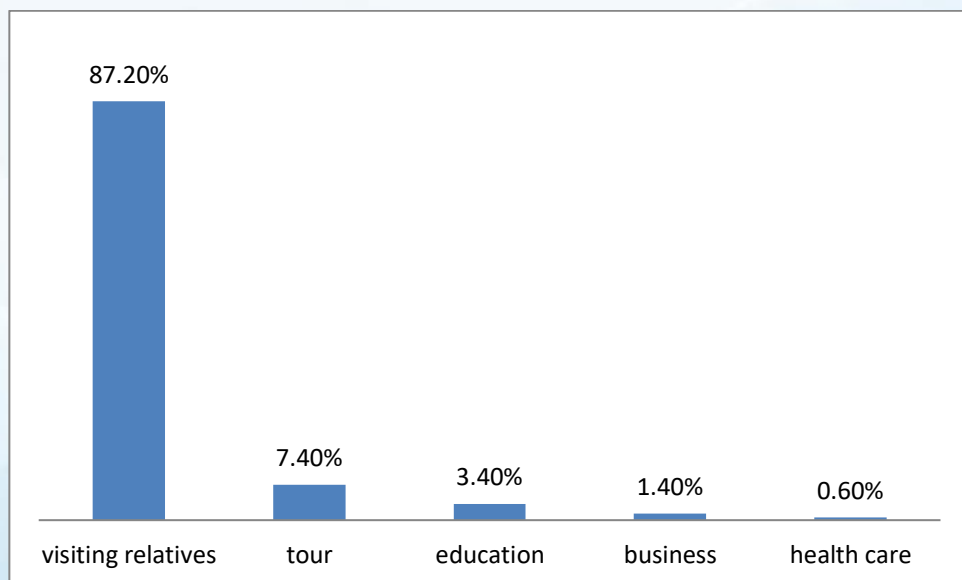
International studies show that in developed countries such as Britain and America there is a strong structure of hospital management and modern and complex technologies. India, Thailand and Malaysia due to their success in the provision of hospital services at the international level and successful marketing in this area, and providing technologies from developed countries in the last decade, have been able to play an effective role in offering international services and also in health tourism.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 10. Center for policy Analysis, (2007): NCPA Policy Report: NO .304

<sup>3</sup>. Manaf NHA, Hussin H, Kassim PNJ, Alavi R, et al. Medical tourism service quality: finally some empirical findings. Total QualManag Bus Excellence. 2015;26:1017-1028. doi:10.1080/14783363.2015.1068597

<sup>4</sup>Medical Tourism: Global Competition in Health Care (2007)., Devon M. Herrick

Variety, high quality and low cost health care in Uzbekistan, considering the geographical conditions in the country, are among important factors in attracting medical tourists in Uzbekistan. In addition, the brilliant and old medical experience of Avicenna, and also skilled and prominent doctors, are significant factors affecting the health tourism in the country. That's the reason why local residents rarely travel abroad to seek for medical care. The graph below clearly depicts that citizens go overseas for a variety of reasons (picture 2):



Picture 2. The proportion of the purpose level of the citizens of Uzbekistan going abroad.

The picture indicates that main percentage of local people of the country who travel abroad for the purpose of meeting their relatives is significantly high (87,2%). Also, tour travel comes next with the percentage of 7,4. The reasons – Education and Business – together make up approximately 5% of all Uzbek tourists. However, the most interesting point is that a marginal 0,6% of them travel for Health Care, which is a clear proof that Uzbekistan offers all the urgent medical treatment and there is no need for locals to go abroad, on the contrary, the country invites foreign patients to its diverse and high quality medical facilities.

Promoting medical tourism industry in Uzbekistan has advantages such as low cost of specialized medical staff and hospitals with modern equipment and Uzbekistan can be very successful in it. But to take advantage of its capabilities in this area, the country faces with challenges.

## Barriers

In a research conducted by Professor Mousu Ghazali (2009), it was considered that the following measures should be taken to promote health tourism industry:

- 1.The use of trained and skilled doctors.
- 2.Investment in medical equipment and increasing the quality of care center.
- 3.Separation of the public section in the hospital from treatment section.
- 4.Creating a consultative relationship between doctor and patient through rapid Response to patient's request by the staff, and paying attention to patients and ask them to comment.
- 5.Looking for a competitive advantage.
- 6.Creating facilities such as Translators, Entertainment services and Arrangement with the hotel. <sup>6</sup>

Language and culturally competent care are the most common barriers to health care delivery. Besides, poor coordination between organizations in medical tourism, the lack of a comprehensive system of collecting data on medical tourists, no usage of electronic health record by provider organizations, hospital staff with little English knowledge, lack of infrastructure necessary for the development of the industry are

<sup>5</sup><http://www.uz.stat.uz/O'zbekistonRespublikasigaturistikmaqsadlardakelganvaketganshaxslar>

<sup>6</sup>"Law Office, Ministry of Health and Medical Education" from [http:// www. Law office.mohme. gov.ir](http://www.Lawoffice.mohme.gov.ir) on 06/23/2005

among the most important reasons why Uzbekistan isn't among the top countries in health tourism industry. Hospitals and clinics that receive and involve with the international medical patients may take heed to the findings by improving, maintaining and increasing the products and services offered. With the high yield, ground breaking medical treatment and procedures provided by the hospitals and clinics will also help the travel agencies in promoting and induce positive image of the country for medical tourism as well. It will also aid country in scrutinizing the drawbacks and strengthening their policies and marketing strategies overseas in attracting potential and revisit of medical tourists and making the country into the preferred destination of world class of medical tourism.

## Measures

Strategies for promoting continuity of care should be implemented to ensure that millions of medical tourists can receive optimal health care. Such strategies include increasing the information exchange between family physicians and overseas clinics and providing follow-up care for medical tourists after they return to their respective homelands. Destination hospitals' official websites should provide additional valuable information for potential medical tourists including transportation, booking service, and procedural information due to the limited availability of information. Peer-support forums are highly recommended.

That's the reason why a great deal of attention is being paid on improving medical tourism in Uzbekistan nowadays. According to the Decree № 5590 called "Complex measurements on complete elaboration of health care system of the Republic of Uzbekistan" of the President of our country, the Cabinet of Ministers has prepared the project called "confirmation of the strategy of development of medical tourism in Uzbekistan in the years 2019-2023".

Based on this project, a non – governmental organization - "Medtravel Global System" has been established in order to increase the effectiveness of the reforms in the areas of tourism and medicine as well as to contribute to the growth in the flow of foreigners in our country.

Uniting two branches – tourism and health care system, the global platform "Medtravel Global System" is expected to be a bridge between them. The main purpose of the organization is to collect several big medical clinics, resorts and tour companies and to increase touristic potential of the country.

All of these strategies are meant to improve medical tourism and thus raise the economic position of the country.

## References

1. The Decree № 5590 called "Complex measurements on complete elaboration of health care system of the Republic of Uzbekistan" of the President of Uzbekistan
2. "Law Office, Ministry of Health and Medical Education" from [http:// www. Law office. mohme. gov.ir](http://www.lawoffice.mohme.gov.ir) on 06/23/2005
3. WiH,S and Moutinhol., Tourism Marketing and Managemeru Handbook, Cornwall, ltd, T.JPress
4. 10. Center for policy Analysis, ( 2007 ) : NCPA Policy Report : NO .304
5. Medical Tourism: Global Competition in Health Care (2007), Devon M. Herrick
6. Manaf NHA, Hussin H, Kassim PNJ, Alavi R, et al. Medical tourism service quality: finally some empirical findings. *TotalQualManagBus Excellence.* 2015;26:1017-1028. doi:10.1080/14783363.2015.1068597
7. A Systematic Review of Publications on Medical Tourism. MasoudFerdosi PhD; AlirezaJabbari PhD; MahmoodKeyvanara PhD; Zahra Agharahimi (2012)
8. <https://uzbektourism.uz/uz/newnews/view?id=896>
9. <http://www.uz.stat.uz/O'zbekiston>