

Medical Tourism Attraction of Tehran Hospitals

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Abstract

Introduction: Today the market of medical tourism is growing as one of the competitive and profitable industries in the world. The aim of this study was to determine medical tourist attraction in Tehran hospitals.

Methods: This is a descriptive study which was carried out in 8 hospitals of Tehran in 2012. 195 people from the managing boards of these hospitals participated in the study. A questionnaire was designed to gather data. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by professors and administrators and reliability was calculated 80% by Cronbach's alpha. The data was analyzed using SPSS.

Findings: The total amount of medical tourist attractions in Tehran hospitals is moderate (51%) and also average number of foreign patients admitted to hospitals and average income for hospitals is also moderate.

Conclusion: According to the results it seems media advertising is the most effective in attracting medical tourists. Furthermore, the advertisement of the capabilities of hospitals alongside marketing could help attract more medical tourists.

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Introduction

Since the current economic situation and other problems in life are the main reasons contributing to high stress levels, medical tourism is a choice for those who seek health plans for their life and keep away from stressful everyday conditions [1]. Medical tourism means travel for treatment and recovery [2]. Today the market of medical tourism is growing as one of the competitive and profitable industries in the world. At the macro level, governments are interested in benefiting from this industry. Fierce competition between different countries, especially developing countries in Asia has begun attracting medical tourists [3]. Other factors such as Globalization and Trade Liberalization in the context of the rapidly growing field of health services have influenced the growth [4].

During the past few years the number of people having used health services outside of their countries has risen [5]. High cost of health

services in industrialized countries, increasing ease of international travel, favorable exchange rates in the world economy, rapid advances in medical technology and standards of care in most countries plus extensive Internet access are other factors which lead to the development of health tourism [6]. The existence of new companies not having medical expertise, but playing an intermediary role between patients and hospital networks throughout the world assists expansion of this new industry [7].

Studies show that increasing health care costs in the United States of America and the long lists in England and Canada has led many American and European patients to travel to the developing countries of Southeast Asia for receiving medical services [8,9]. So McKinsey in reports estimates that the revenue from health tourism in the global market reaches nearly 100 billion dollars in 2012(3). Research in Thailand showed that governmental planning and infrastructural



development strategies revolving around treatment centers and hospitals, technology, medical equipment and skilled man power boost medical tourism [10].

Iran considering its advantages in medical tourism, including low-cost, high quality health services, competent doctors and possessing abundant natural attractions, should decide to use this advantages [11]; Poor coordination among organizations responsible for medical tourism, lack of specialized working committees in the Ministry of Health and Medical Education and Cultural Heritage organization, the lack of a comprehensive system for collecting data entry of medical tourists to Iran, inefficient system of information on medical tourist attractions of Iran and legal vacuum for the development of this industry have led Iranian medical tourism industry not to achieve desirable targets[12].

Iran could potentially attract 5% of total healthcare payment of neighboring countries which amounts to 5/2 million dollars equalling 1/3 of revenues from non-oil exports [13]. In addition, on the horizon of 1400 our country would be one of the major health tourism hubs in the region that not only lessens the capital outflow but also substantially raises foreign exchange earnings [14].

Medical tourism has an important position in the global economy and the weakness of the information system in Iran challenges this industry. Present research has been conducted to survey the medical tourism attraction of Tehran's hospitals.

Methods

This article is a cross-sectional study. Statistical population includes hospitals and public health centers that are eligible for medical tourism; General conditions are approved by the Ministry of Health:

- 1- Having a legal license
- 2- Having valuation certificates and minimum degree, during two consecutive years
- 3- Obtaining a minimum grade in intensive care units, including ICU, PICU, CCU in the hospital for evaluation

Finally, eight samples were randomly selected from public, private and social hospitals. Table 1 Profile of general hospitals has been studied.

A questionnaire was designed by the researcher to gather data which includes 26 questions according to the two indices, average number of foreign patients admitted to hospitals and average income for hospitals. Questions were scored by three levels of low, medium and high.

Validity of the questionnaire was approved by professors and experts in hospitals' managing boards and its reliability through Cronbach's alpha. The questionnaire was distributed among 195 people of all levels of hospital management. Data was analyzed using SPSS₁₆ software. In the above analysis, descriptive statistics were used.

Results

As Table 1 shows, 43% of respondents were in public hospitals and 41% in private. The 16% of the rest were in social security hospitals. Also the following table shows that 33 percent of men and 67 percent were women.

Tourism uptake of respondents in all hospitals was moderate. Attraction of medical tourists in the hospital No. 1 and No. 7 of those polled were more than other hospitals and hospital No. 6 was less than the rest (Table 2).

This information is based on table 3: medical tourist attraction in three private, governmental and social security hospitals were 51 percent on average, 26 percent high and 23 percent respectively; But the private hospitals surpass other hospitals in tourists, attraction

Table 1. Distribution of respondents' gender and type of hospital separation

Sex	Hospital Type	Private		Public		Social Security		Total	
		No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Male		23	12	28	14	13	7	64	33
Female		57	29	56	29	18	9	131	67
Total		80	41	84	43	31	16	195	100

Table 2. Medical tourism attraction

Hospital Type	Hospitals	Medical Tourism Attraction			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
Private	1	0	15	10	25
	2	6	8	4	18
	3	2	10	7	19
	4	2	8	8	18
Public	5	4	12	3	19
	6	17	14	3	34
	7	6	16	10	32
Social Security	8	7	16	7	30
Total		44	99	52	195
Percentage		23	51	26	100

Discussion and Conclusion

The total amount of medical tourists attracted to the hospitals of Tehran is moderate. Hospital No. 1 had the highest rate of attracted medical tourists among other hospitals. Advertising capabilities in the medical field, doctors, and technology, service quality can lead medical tourists to get attracted [15].

According to the international medical journal, the main source of medical trips, are high quality and low cost services [16]. Khodayari also believes that the most important part of achieving medical tourists is meeting the international standards [17].

Tourists through the Internet can find a global information system, tourist sites, pages, advertisements, intermediaries and service providers and specialized databases [18,19]. Kazemi Also, in his research emphasizes Intersectional cooperation at the macro level to devise operational strategies for attracting medical tourism [20]. Lagiewsky and Rick

concluded in their study that ability to attract tourists in the health sector and in the international market is dependent on ensuring the quality of service [21]. Jones Keith in her study, believes that people from countries could travel with high quality and low cost and lack of waiting lists for treatment [22].

To be specific, budget advertising campaign and the exhibition of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism organization promote the empowerment of Iran in the field of medical tourism. It can also persuade Iranian elite of doctors, specialists, medical and welfare facilities, medical centers, technology and ... to be more active. Moreover, organizations responsible for creating a mechanism for accreditation of medical centers with international accreditation mechanisms like JCI are pushed to enhance the quality of services in hospitals in order to attract more medical tourists.

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