
Medical Tourism and Its Popularity in Canada

Medical tourism can be quite appealing to Canadians; however, it can lead to healthcare delivery challenges with potential ethical and medical-legal risks.

Demographic variations, especially the aging population, along with the rising incidence of chronic conditions add to the demand for better health services. Waiting times, the mounting cost of healthcare in home countries, and the availability of cheaper alternatives in other countries has led to escalating demand for seeking treatment overseas.

Medical/Legal/Business Concerns

Canadians who travel as medical tourists create a platform for potential medical-legal risks for Canadian physicians. Patients can be influenced by the information available on the websites, which may be deceptive. Moreover, gathering reliable information about the quality of services can be challenging. There is a risk of substandard care and a lack of clinical documentation. Therefore, it becomes difficult for Canadian physicians to provide follow-up care for procedures that may have been done poorly or for which they have little or no knowledge or experience. Canadians who travel overseas for treatment spent \$447-million in 2013 compared with \$150-million spent by foreigners on health care in Canada in the same year. Currently, approximately 11 million people travel abroad for medical care, with the global market growing at 15-25% each year and is estimated to be worth \$38.5-billion to \$55-billion.

Analytical Framework and Objectives

The most common reasons are due to deficiencies in the current Medicare system. These include long wait times, the unavailability of certain inadequately-funded or unapproved services (i.e. stem cell transplantation), high out-of-pocket costs for services not covered by Medicare such as dental surgeries, and access to a higher quality of care. For example, waitlists for hip replacement can be up to a year in Canada. However, patients with financial resources can receive this treatment immediately in India where providers even offer vacation bundles along with their treatment package. Other hotspot medical tourism destinations include India, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore.

Strengths

- Revenue earned
- High-quality services at affordable cost

Weaknesses

- Lower level of coordination between the various players in the industry
- Substandard facilities, unethical care

Opportunities

-
- Aging population, lifestyle changes contributing to the development of wellness and alternative cures Threats
 - Strong competition from countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore
 - Insufficient Medical Insurance coverage for overseas treatment

Some believe that with an aging population in Canada there will be an increase in those interested in medical tourism which could require changes to current healthcare policies. Canadian physicians can talk to their patients regarding medical tourism to help minimize adverse outcomes. Though the reimbursement of medical tourism through Medicare has been relatively limited, there are groups currently lobbying for increased coverage. Even within the current Medicare framework, the coverage of out-of-country treatments may reduce strains on the current healthcare system as well as reduce direct costs. However, there is a need to consider the indirect impacts on the economy due to these dollars being spent outside of the country.

eduzaurus.com