

Globalization, medical tourism and health equity

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“.....Medical tourism has never been new in history. What is new is the recognition of its emergence:
i) as a global medical business potentially challenging the dominance of health care markets in the developed world, and
ii) as a threat, pushing health disparities even further in developing countries.

Based on a review of available literature, this paper discusses the origin and growth of medical tourism as a new global business, identifies the key enabling factors of growth, and assesses its impact on health care, generally, and equity in health care, specifically.

This paper begins by looking at the recent trend of the flow of patients seeking medical care abroad and the amount of money invested in host countries. An outline of a conceptual framework is constructed to show how globalization, market economy and technological innovations have changed global health markets to create a space for the expansion of medical tourism.

This paper illustrates how increasing health care costs and long waiting periods in the developed world, low wage and competitive health markets in the developing world, availability of low cost transportation, and access to advanced information technologies have created opportunity to expand medical tourism in many developing countries. Medical tourism is argued to have contributed to expanding health sectors, generating additional revenues and improving quality of and access to health services in provider countries. On the other hand, it may have become a threat to these same health systems by accelerating an internal brain-drain from public to private hospitals and promoting health disparities in destination countries.

This paper concludes that medical tourism as an alternative approach to health care is neither positive nor negative in itself, but a historical process in continuous evolution in health care systems. Finally, the paper proposes to develop an agenda for medical tourism governance to routinely monitor its growth and establish a regulatory framework for in order to translate its benefits for all.....”

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