

# **DEVELOPING MEDICAL TOURISM IN EGYPT, BENCHMARKING ON DUBAI, UAE.**

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**Abstract - "Medical tourism" refers to traveling to another country for medical care. It is estimated that up to 750,000 US residents travel abroad for care each year. Many people who travel for care do so because treatment is much cheaper in another country. In addition, a large number of medical tourists are immigrants to the United States returning to their home country for care. The most common procedures that people undergo on medical tourism trips include cosmetic surgery, dentistry, and heart surgery.**

**This research first examines relevant literature on possibility to develop this tourism type in Egypt and make it one of the tourist attractions by comparing it to Dubai, UAE as a medical destination. The study explores the objectives, and factors affecting the progress of that type in Egypt and the improvements made in Dubai. The research then investigates potentialities of developing that type in Egypt and its impacts on improving the tourist experience in Egypt and increasing the tourist flow into Egypt. Results indicated that medical tourism could face several obstacles in practical performance, but it could be very helpful in supporting the tourism industry in Egypt especially at the time of deterioration. However, medical tourism can also offer incentives to the tourism employees who have almost lost their jobs and may change their career. Benefits are not only confined to this, but also extended to cover enhancing existing tourism types and**

**introducing new ones as well as enhancing the tourist numbers and their average expenditure. The Research provides recommendations for actions that could encourage more tourists to visit Egypt as a medical destination.**

**Key words: Medical, Dubai, Therapeutic, Health, Wellness.**

## **I. Introduction**

Though traveling abroad for health benefits is not a recent concept, it has been gaining more momentum and media interest in the last decades. Since the recognition and increased popularity of medical tourism, no unified definition has been universally accepted. This strongly affects the reliability and comparability of data, quality of published research, reports, statistics and articles. There have been however several attempts to define "medical tourism". Medical tourism, alternatively called health tourism and wellness tourism, is a term that has risen from the rapid growth of an industry where people from all around the world are traveling to other countries to obtain medical, dental, and surgical care while at the same time touring, vacationing, and fully experiencing the attractions of the countries that they are visiting.

When people who live in one country travel to another country to receive medical, dental and surgical care while at the same time receiving equal to or greater care than they would have in their own country, and are travelling for medical care because of affordability, better access to care or a higher level of quality of care.

Health tourism comprises all travel activities for a wide range of health and wellbeing purposes such as healthcare, health assessment, surgery and operation, plastic surgeries, beauty, healing, cure, rehabilitation, convalescence, combined with leisure, recreational and cultural activities at the visited destination.

## **II. Medical Tourism Definition**

Health and Wellness Tourism is, travelling to another city for the purpose of receiving medical or wellness services. It is divided into two categories:

1. Health Tourism: travelling to receive medical treatment in specialized institutions jointly with tourism programs.
2. Wellness Tourism: healthy people travelling to other cities to maintain their physical and psychological health through receiving certain services in specialized institutions.

## **III. The Impacts of Medical Tourism**

The growth of medical tourism, as a new business model, cannot be explained without looking at its interactions with economic, social and political forces. In figures, the size and scope of this industry are staggering. According to a recent report by KPMG, global medical travel was valued at U.S. \$10.5 billion in 2012, a figure projected to reach U.S. \$32.5 billion by 2019. The number of patients traveling for healthcare, meanwhile, may be as many as 30-50 million, though estimates vary widely due to different survey methods employed across countries. A useful compromise, provided by the organization Patients beyond Borders (2014), estimates a stock of 11 million medical travelers, each spending U.S. \$3,500-\$5,000 per visit, resulting in a market size of U.S. \$38.5-\$55 billion.

The medical travel market has seen growth of 15-25% per year, with an estimated value of 38.5-55 billion USD, so most countries that engage to deliver care to

medical tourists do so to increase the level direct foreign exchange earnings coming into their country to improve their balance of payments position.

Medical tourism has the potential to accelerate health technology transfer to less developed countries. With the expansion of medical tourism, some of the large hospitals in the host countries have transformed themselves to become centers of excellence and regional hubs for advanced medical care. The newly gained status and strength of these hospitals have the potential not only to reduce the dominance of major Western medical facilities but also to contribute to a reduction in global inequality by providing high quality care for clients in the regions. In the developed world with a large proportion of the population without health insurance, the growth in medical tourism might contribute to a reduction in health disparities in those countries by creating opportunities for such persons to receive essential medical care abroad.

## **IV. Factors Affecting Medical Tourists Flow**

Destination countries generally attract patients from surrounding countries. For example, Hungary tends to attract Western European patients while Singapore and Malaysia are natural destinations for patients from Indonesia or the Philippines.

Geographical proximity is likely related to cost because the more distant countries tend to be associated with higher travel costs. Thus patient travel is likewise affected by wider economic and external factors such as exchange rate fluctuations, restrictions to travel (ease in obtaining visas), security concerns and, very importantly, the lack of insurance portability.

Most medical tourism services are paid out-of-pocket by patients who either have no insurance coverage or whose insurance does not cover the medical

procedures they want, for example, cosmetic surgery. The lack of insurance portability remains a major barrier to the growth of medical tourism in developing countries because only a subset of potential medical travelers – those who have sufficient funds for out of pocket operations – can take advantage of medical tourism opportunities.

Cultural affinity and familiarity is another factor that influences patient movement. Thus countries at times focus on attracting their own diaspora population. For example, the Republic of Korea, India and Mexico attract large number of their own expatriates who have migrated to the United States or Europe but still retain familiarity with their own culture and have immediate confidence in their own treatment systems. Other countries explore historical colonial ties like India with the United Kingdom.

#### V. Destinations for Medical Tourism

Regions	Countries
Asia-Middle East	Thailand, India, Singapore, Malaysia, <b>Turkey</b> , <a href="#">Israel</a> , <a href="#">The Philippines</a> and <a href="#">China</a>
Europe	Spain, <b>Turkey</b> , Germany, Hungary, Poland, Malta, Croatia, Portugal, Austria, Greece, and Macedonia.
Latin America	Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Brazil and Argentina
Africa	South Africa

Source: [www.health-tourism.com/destinations/](http://www.health-tourism.com/destinations/),  
1/11/2016

#### VI. Dubai as Destination of Medical Tourism

In 2010, the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) spent a quarter of its total healthcare budget to send its citizens abroad for medical treatment. These patients, consumers who cross international borders for the purpose of obtaining healthcare, are participants in a phase of globalization referred to as “medical travel” or “medical tourism.” Their

movement coincides with the cross-border flow of health services, professionals, and companies, shaping a global industry valued at as much as U.S. \$55 billion. In the years ahead, this industry is expected to grow—and, in doing so, to bring a greater number of national health systems in contact with international patients and providers.

Dubai is the most populous city in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is located on the southern coast of the Persian Gulf on the Arabian Peninsula. The UAE is surrounded by Oman and Saudi Arabia. Dubai is quickly gaining popularity as a Medical Tourism Destination due to its low cost, English speaking medical staff, and virtually no queues for treatments.

Dubai’s emergence as a potential hub for medical travel is a decade-long endeavor that draws its momentum from the considerable direction of the Dubai government. Such direction entails both vision and execution in support of the emirate’s medical travel ambitions. In terms of vision, Dubai’s leadership values healthcare as both a growth sector, given the emirate’s limited oil reserves, and a prestige sector and its aim of becoming a global site for high-level services.

It is with these elements in mind that, in 2002, High Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, gave a speech praising a then fledgling medical travel project as something that highlighted the “integrated process of development” and created “a bridge between Europe and Asia” .

In support of these objectives, the City was set up as a free zone, using legal and economic inducements—namely, and complete ownership of facilities, tax-free and without the requirement of local partners—to

convince international partners to establish operations within its confines.

Dubai well known as Healthcare city, Dubai offers a myriad of first-class medical treatments including cochlear implants, diabetes treatments, orthopedics, cardiology, oncology, obesity surgery, neurology, plastic & cosmetic surgery, physical therapy, dermatology, rheumatology, ophthalmology, lung treatments, and urology.

Dubai won the “Highly Recommended Destination of the Year,” for medical tourism, by the International Medical Travel Journal (IMTJ) during the IMTJ Medical Award 2016 in Spain last week. This achievement reaffirms that Dubai is on the right path towards fulfilling its goal of becoming a favorite destination for medical tourism.

Dubai Medical Tourism (DMT) program shall offer diverse services from complex medical treatment to exotic travel and tour. There is an evident need for a common platform where all the participating healthcare facilities can collectively share and contribute to the success of this program. Dubai Medical Tourism Club will be a non-profit association made up of the participating healthcare providers in the program, with the common goal of promoting the highest level of quality of healthcare to medical tourists to Dubai.

Healthcare providers at destinations like Dubai are keen to have strong ties with international medical educational institutions for training, technology transfer and for marketing as well as image building.

Dubai also as a medical tourist destination published prices of services which can easily be obtained from the internet or from the International Patient Centers which belong to the providers. Also database systems have been developed to monitor the number of

international patients and revenues gained from the sector.

Dubai Medical Tourism Club (DMT), a voluntary association of private hospitals, polyclinics, and Specialty centers whose members receive exclusive access to Dubai Health Authority (DHA) marketing products, including networking opportunities and listing on Dubai Medical Tourism official website.

#### **VII. Recent Medical Developments in UAE**

The population of the Middle East region is growing rapidly and is expected to reach over 520 Million by 2030. This with rising income levels, an increase in lifestyle-related diseases such as diabetes and obesity, and the industry collectively upgrading to world-class standards will increase the demand for medical services and professionals as well as healthcare spending.

While Middle Eastern governments actively promote the ‘wellness concept’ through increased awareness and public advertisement campaigns, the UAE has made great strides in improving health awareness, particularly in the country’s most prominent illnesses, which include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, arthritis, thalassemia, cancer and obesity.

Government initiatives such as banning smoking in most closed public areas and banning unhealthy food in schools canteens are meant to promote a healthy lifestyle. Diabetes is currently one of the fastest growing debilitating conditions in the world and in the UAE it is estimated that one out of five people aged between 20 and 79 years lives with the condition— with a similar percentage of the population remaining at risk of developing the disease. Cardiovascular disease causes nearly 30 per cent of all deaths in the UAE each year, with cancer the third leading cause of mortality in the country accounting for approximately 500 deaths per year.

Health care regulations and standards are essential to ensure compliance and to provide safe health care practices to every individual who accesses the system. Health authorities, at multiple levels of governance (federal, state and local) regulate practitioners and facilities, provide information about industry changes, promote safety and ensure legal compliance and quality services. The Emirate of Dubai has a distinguished healthcare infrastructure, governed by the Health Regulation Department under Dubai Health Authority (DHA).

Sequential to the success of the first conference in 2014, Dubai Health Authority host the second version of the Dubai Health Regulation Conference in 2016. The two-day event aims to bring together professionals and experts from around the globe for knowledge sharing of best practices and evidence based outcomes of effective healthcare regulations and standards.

### **VIII. Medical Tourism in Egypt**

Egypt's popularity in the medical tourism industry comes from its therapeutic aftercare and use of natural resources. Egypt takes advantage of its natural spring water and relaxing hot climate when dealing with patients from abroad, using natural remedies when manufactured drugs aren't necessary.

Today, Egypt appears to have all the ingredients of a medical tourism hub. Weather, proximity to Europe, affordable prices for both treatments and tourism attractions, a wide range of services at integrated medical centers, and healthcare professionals with international education and training should make Egypt a favorable destination for many. However, there are a number of reasons why Egypt falls short of claiming a share of the medical tourism industry comparable to competing nations, such as Jordan or South Africa.

Adopted the medical tourism and hospital in Egypt for a long time on natural ingredients and is considered one of the richest environments where there are natural elements of interest as therapeutic spread by natural spring's sulfur, and mineral sands and warm. The analysis has shown the laboratory to contain many of these natural springs at the highest rate of elemental sulfur compared to wells located in various parts of the world as containing this natural water on several metal salts and some metals of therapeutic value such as sodium carbonate and varying proportions of some metallic elements such as magnesium and iron.

There are various tourist areas, which have the advantage [of medical tourism in Egypt](#), areas of known historic ancient, such as: Helwan, Ain-Sira, Al Ain Sokhna, Hurghada, Fayoum, [the oasis](#), Aswan, Sinai, and finally the city of Safaga parked on the beach of the Red Sea, which has all the elements of tourism treatment and to be visited tourist groups and fame that comes black sand have the ability to get rid of some skin diseases.

Thus why Egypt is a unique location on the map of medical tourism and has become an important destination for those who wish to get medical care from all over the world where tourists come forth to enjoy the healthy climate and natural medical treatment.

### **IX. Medical Tourism Obstacles in Egypt**

1. There is very limited data available on health tourism as a result of the very limited activities of this sector. In some cases when data was available perceived confidentiality prevented the release of the information.
2. The key existing players with the potential to lead the development of medical tourism in Egypt are limited. However efforts will still need to be expanded

to ensure these key players can provide a competitive world class service.

3. Many of hospitals require very significant changes to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their operations. The major challenges facing these organizations will be to achieve international accreditation, upgrade their nursing systems and accredit their physicians.

4. Also as important, all these organizations will need to acquire the marketing expertise needed to develop competitive products and identify target markets.

Developing countries are seeking to capitalize on these flows and are linking medical care with actual tourist activities. This commercial linkage between healthcare and tourism is a rapidly developing and profitable industry that is attracting growing interest amongst health researchers, but Research and evaluation has not kept pace with the development of medical tourism in Egypt and there is a need for national governments and potentially international bodies to invest in research this area.

As they say "Safety First," it is an important point to consider when planning for a medical tourism holiday. Safety here refers to the how secure you are going to be in a foreign country and the how efficiently you need to abide by the laws to evade any sort of national integrity issues. There may be even problems related to acts of terrorism and violence in some countries like Egypt that can be avoided with proper planning.

Egypt is typical of a health system that has been neglected by the government. And this is not since yesterday or since the revolution. This has been happening for the last 20 or 30 years. The Egyptian government plays a marginal role in the country's public health care system despite Egypt having the highest prevalence of hepatitis C (14.7% of the population), high rates of obesity and hypertension

(17.6% of the adult population) and endemic poverty. When government fails to adequately invest in health care, the private sector and market step in to fill the void, alleviating problems while also creating new ones. The market doesn't invest in safety and quality unless it gets a return.

After 30 years of governmental neglect, the Egyptian health care system is riddled with unsafe practices and a lack of personnel and facilities.

Many hospitals in medical travel destinations are not a part of the networks of the payers of developed markets. Therefore, they are not able to work directly with insurance companies and other health care funders, which continue to be a major institutional hurdle in the growth of the medical tourism industry.

#### **X. Findings**

1. Successful medical tourism combines medicine with tourism to offer a combined holistic service.
2. Best practitioners are keen to attend the international medical tourism events whether they are mega events such as International Health Tourism Congress or smaller events such as conference and exhibitions. Also, Asian countries as well as Dubai have shown a growing interest in hosting such events at their destinations.
3. Dubai as a leading medical tourism destination have developed a clear vision and strategic objectives for its medical tourism sector and set specified goals to be accomplished within specific timeframes. Accordingly, relevant strategies, plans and programs to reach such objectives have been clearly.
4. The Egyptian government provides little in the way of support compared to official attempts in Dubai where medical tourism conferences and associations are encouraged and coordinated to create hundreds of protocols and packages suitable to diverse consumers.

5. Sensationalized and unfair media attacks have lowered the confidence in Egyptian medical practices. National media outlets, in an effort to sell advertising and increase readership and viewership, typically concentrate on cases of medical neglect and rarely report on successes.
6. This syndicate of providers and government officials in Egypt fails to market medical tourism based upon its competitive prices and high quality standards or do they respond with scientific evidence to media criticism. More teamwork is needed for Egypt to gain a foothold on the medical tourism market in the region. The good news is that an opportunity has not been entirely lost.

#### **XI. Recommendations**

1. Egyptian government has to start crafting its own vision and strategic objectives for medical tourism sector.
2. Identifying Egypt's competitive advantages, debating different scenarios for the sector development, setting short and long term Egyptian medical tourism goals and drawing main pillars for the medical tourism development.
3. It is important to develop competitive websites for the sector key players (mainly the Medical Tourism Association, healthcare providers and travel agencies). All information on the medical as well as support services should be clearly available on such websites.
4. Egyptian healthcare providers willing to enter the field should consider direct and relationship marketing as an important tool to compete internationally and should plan to have a department or bureau to serve international patients.
5. Egypt needs to firstly verify the quality of its health tourism products (medical tourism as well as medical wellness tourism) through accreditation and affiliation

and then approach the international health insurance companies.

6. The importance of Egypt's presence at international medical tourism events while working on hosting one of such events, when it can offer attractive products.

7. Egypt needs to work on its international accreditations and the quality of its medical staff, because even though the facilities and service quality dimension ranked 4<sup>th</sup>. It is still way behind the scores of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, which are the two kingdoms ahead in the region.

8. Working with its cost advantage not only in the area, but also when it comes to competing in the world to bring visitors for healthcare reasons, can help boost its medical tourism industry, as this factor is usually the most important when making a decision for where to get treated.

9. One positive and significant aspect of the medical tourism model is the opportunity of Egypt to expand and develop its health infrastructure and health human resource base

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