Mini-case study: The impact of culture in medical tourism

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyze the results of three journal articles regarding the impact cultures could have on medical tourism, which has become a growing industry in recent years (Liu & Chen, 2013). Analyzing these three articles was challenging as they provide different perspectives on the impact of culture on medical tourism. However, common points have been identified and recommendations have been given for the Swiss medical tourism providers.

Synthesis

According to An, a cross-cultural approach may help to examine factors related to American, Russian, Japanese and Chinese tourists going to Korea for medical tourism. Results of a survey show that the overall attitudes differ significantly across these 4 countries. The decision to undertake medical tourism is highly complex and several motivational and risks factors have been chosen following recent studies to conduct the survey:

Table 1: Summary of Identified Factors by An

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Sub-factors</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical service</td>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Crooks et al. (2011)</td>
<td>High costs for procedures in home countries</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Availability of procedures</td>
<td>Burkett (2007)</td>
<td>Procedures unavailable in home countries and seeking alternative medicine treatments</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality of service</td>
<td>Horowitz and Rosensweig (2007)</td>
<td>Skills of staff, reliability of medical centers, and quality of service, care, and facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Ease of travel</td>
<td>Crooks et al. (2011)</td>
<td>Destination location, visa procedures, facilitators, package deals, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Access to information</td>
<td>Horowitz et al. (2007)</td>
<td>Hospital websites, travel agents, or blogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>Health-related risk</td>
<td>Forgione and Smith (2007)</td>
<td>Infection and inadequate blood supply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travel-related risk</td>
<td>Howze (2007)</td>
<td>Long-distance travel with a serious health condition and psychological or emotional stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-operative risk</td>
<td>Crooks et al. (2010)</td>
<td>Unable to obtain appropriate advice from regular doctors or difficulty in transferring information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results provide interesting issues for marketers. They shows that Travel-related risks are the most influential factor among Russian, Japanese and Chinese patients. For the Americans,
Health-related risks is the most influential one. Regarding the other factors, they have different effect across the four nations (An, 2013).

Han and Hwang have identified the possible benefits perceive by Chinese, Japanese, and Korean traveler groups in a medical hotel (and what roles these benefits play in generating perceived value and behavioral intention). Results show that an increase in financial saving, convenience and medical service leads to tourists’ perceiving that a medical hotel provides a good deal. Moreover, patients would recommend the hotel they were visiting when they perceive that a stay in that particular hotel is convenient, safe in terms of medical-service quality and valuable. (Han & Hwang, 2013)

One of the objective of the article by Liu and Chen was to discuss and analyze the relationship between culture and medical services. This article explained that medical tourism has become a growing industry in recent years, both for advanced and developing countries involved in this field. Some examples are given; Americans fly to Mexico to receive medical care in order to reduce culture shock and British medical tourists seem to prefer India for that kind of services. The results show that cultural competence should be integrated into healthcare system, medical organizations and individuals. Countries providing medical tourism services should examine the communications methods between doctors-patients and doctors-patients cultures because a lack of sufficient cultural competence can lead to cultural respect issues. Healthcare providers should educate their employees, with a small booklet or video demonstration for example. (Liu & Chen, 2013)

Analyzing these three articles is challenging as they provide a different perspective on the impact of culture on medical tourism. They are focusing on different characteristics: An has based his paper on factors related to perceptions and attitudes toward medical for 4 different nationalities (An, 2013). Han and Hwang have more centered their research on benefits perceived by medical tourists and what roles those benefits play in the behavioral intentions (Han & Hwang, 2013). Regarding the article from Liu and Chen, its speaks more generally about the relationship between culture and medical tourism.
However, the three articles have also common points. First of all, they all stress the fact that medical tourism is highly correlated to the country of origin and the culture of the medical tourists. Moreover, it is also pointed out that medical costs and quality of services have an influence on their behavior. Furthermore, they all mention that in order to be a competitive medical tourism destination, cultural characteristics have to be identified and understood.

(An, 2013) (Han & Hwang, 2013) (Liu & Chen, 2013)

Assessment of the relevance of these articles for Swiss Tourism

National culture has an important role in the purchase decision of a potential customer (Han & Hwang, 2013). Consequently, Swiss suppliers should increase their cultural awareness in order to provide a personalized offer for each different cultures.

For the same motive, staff training is absolutely essential because it has been shown with the case of Korea that two-thirds of the medical tourists exhibited strong revisit intention to Korea for further service (Liu & Chen, 2013). Therefore, customer satisfaction should be one of the main objective of Swiss suppliers.

Swiss medical tourism suppliers may be interested in the fact that tourists held positive views on Korea as a medical tourism destination probably because of the high quality of medical services, easy access to information, and relatively low risks involved with travel and medical procedures (An, 2013). Therefore there is an opportunity for Switzerland which has an interesting similarity with Korea: high quality reputation. Swiss suppliers should make further studies on that country to increase their share markets, by promoting the “Swiss label” with its reputation of high quality for example.

It is important for Swiss Tourism to know that national culture is determinant in the patient travelers’ decision formation in a medical-hotel context (Han & Hwang, 2013). Swiss medical suppliers should pay close attention to the nationality of their patients in order to perceive what specific criteria and requirements are important for each traveler’s culture.
Swiss tourism should also take into account the fact that hospitality product has an important role for the Chinese medical tourists and that the impact of medical service is vital for the Japanese and Korean tourists (Han & Hwang, 2013). These countries can be an opportunity for Swiss tourism as source markets.

Swiss medical service providers should have as an objective the increase of cultural competence and respect for diverse cultural values among systems, organizations and individuals (Liu & Chen, 2013). Training is imperative in order to recognize and respect foreign culture, people and ethnicities. In order to attract more medical tourists, the Swiss suppliers should promote the high-quality of their medical technology. Moreover, they should organize training for their employees to increase their cultural competences. Booklet and video demonstration are good examples (Liu & Chen, 2013).
Table of references

