LESSONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA FROM ASIA ON MEDICAL TOURISM’S PRACTICE AND POTENTIAL

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Abstract
This study focuses on the medical tourism market in Asia and particularly on India and Thailand, two countries South Africa should strive to emulate in their offerings for the local medical tourism industry. When tourists travel to another country for medical treatment as well as for sightseeing, the practice is called medical tourism. In the last few years this trend has increased. This emergent global trend of increased medical tourism is expected to gain momentum in the coming decades as travelers seek destinations abroad that are associated with wellness and affordable medical care. How countries are marketing medical tourism destinations and the choices of consumers in this regard are important aspects for the South African tourism market to consider. Additionally, the economic impact of medical tourism on countries such as especially India, where it is virtually a routine practice, and how tourism may be affected by the development of medical pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, and medical industry job creation, are aspects worthy of consideration as South Africa seeks to obtain an important part of the market. Medical tourists cannot make an informed choice about treatment when comparing different hospitals in different countries and at best make a partially informed choice. The strategy should be to get them to come to South Africa because we are a preferred option with a good reputation in healthcare. This article seeks to address these issues and make suggestions on how medical tourism offerings can be improved in South Africa so as to make medical tourism increase in volume.

Keywords
Health care, medical tourism, affordability

INTRODUCTION
Medical tourism is a rather old phenomenon in which mainly wealthier patients traveled to other countries to receive the best treatment possible. In ancient Greece, for example, pilgrims and patients came from all over the Mediterranean to the centers of ancient healing, namely ancient Asklepios and Epidaurus, and doctors swore by the strong ethically based Hippocratic Oath. The almost god-like Asklepios was very ambitious in treating all ailments and curing any disease and the sick from many lands sought his help in treating their diverse maladies during their visits to his sanctuaries in the 4th Century B.C. The spread of the cult of Asklepios strongly suggests that a craft or science and a corpus of knowledge unlike any other available at the time, attracted patients to ancient Greece from far off lands. Hippocrates of course, has also had a great many surviving ancient medical works attributed to him. His consort was ‘Health’ and her attendant was ‘All-Healing’. He also treated many foreigners.[1]

Ancient Egyptian medicine occupied a position somewhere between empirical science and superstitious magic but was greatly respected and the doctors were priests. They practiced cosmetic medicine, gynecology, and seem to have known the importance of the heart. They often treated patients with spells and potions when they had little knowledge of a particular ailment such as in most internal illnesses. Despite shortcomings, the ancient Egyptian priest-doctors treated patients from Nubia, Mesopotamia and even Persia and Babylonia. Egyptian physicians were thus regarded as this very highly prized as well as organized ‘magicians’ and general practitioners, surgeons, mummifiers and ophthalmologists. Even Egyptian dentists and bone-setters were greatly revered in neighbouring states. The god Ra-Atum was the sponsor of medical treatment when patients could not pay their priest-doctor. Many papyri have been uncovered which attest to the fact that Egyptian medical practitioners were sought to treat a wide variety of ailments including ulcers, cancers, constipation, urinary and respiratory disorders, migraines and bilharzias and many other diseases that local physicians could not treat effectively.[2]

RESEARCH TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES
My units of analysis, the Indian and Thai medical tourism industries, had to fulfill certain characteristics in order to be useful for analysis. Firstly, they had to be shown to be noteworthy examples of how medical tourism should be conducted so as to bolster tourism. Furthermore, they should both have a tangible structure associated with quality medical tourism initiatives and practices. We then decided what we needed to know about the Indian and Thai medical tourism industries if we are to be more successful in South Africa. In this the researcher found the work of a number of authors to be conceptually useful. We then assessed the information obtained and produced case studies that can stand alone as good examples of how to conduct medical tourism in an effective manner. The study attempted to answer the fundamental research questions which are: (i) What precisely is medical tourism? (ii) Why are the Indian and Thai medical tourism industries so uniquely placed to capture large medical tourism markets? (iii) What basic model could South Africa adopt to further enhance medical tourism to our shores? When seeking to answer these questions we examined the nations in question and identified how they engaged in the creation of unique medical tourism offerings. It became apparent that their
successful participation and leading roles in the global medical tourism industry is created and sustained via a series of highly localized processes and that a culture of service quality excellence contributes to their overall success.

For the researcher the really interesting questions to answer revolved around what South Africa could do to also capture a huge share of the expanding global medical tourism market.

LITERATURE SURVEY RESULTS

After surveying a wide range of qualitative studies the researcher determined that today, there are generally two types of medical tourism. The first is consumers opting to travel abroad in the hope of finding more affordable healthcare. The other is where consumers take out of the ordinary vacations abroad and coalesce this with surgery and other medical treatment. This is not surprising as a partial hip replacement procedure in India for example could be anything between $5,000 and $9,000, and thus roughly 50 percent cheaper than in Britain. Dental care for tourists is also a potentially huge market. In an effort to protect their privacy and confidentiality, many patients including celebrities often seek medical care in other countries. Medical and socio-economic problems at home are seminal to the appearance of medical tourism. Patients from highly industrialized nations like the USA and Britain are often attracted to overseas hospitals and clinics by the relatively low cost of medical care.

To benefit from such situations, some tourists are prepared to leave their country and have procedure performed in another country where healthcare standards in private hospitals are considered to be at least equal to, or even better than at home and prices definitely more affordable. In the USA the costs of medical procedures are soaring and health insurance coverage is decreasing. This makes medical tourism an attractive option and often a necessity. It is not uncommon for the residents of some countries with supposedly excellent national health systems to seek the option of medical tourism abroad simply as a means of accelerating their treatment time because long waiting lists exist at home. When travel costs are calculated into the price of treatment abroad, many residents of developed countries conclude that treatment abroad is in fact a better option for them for certain conditions. Medical tourism is growing exponentially on an annual basis across the globe. In the European Union approximately 9% of GDP is spent on healthcare and in the USA, this is as much as 16% of GDP. Since 1960, the increase in healthcare spending in the OECD countries has been 2% higher than the GDP. This implies that healthcare is absorbing an ever increasing proportion of the national wealth of the countries involved. Should this trend continue, it is conceivable that by 2050 up to at least 25% of the GDP of these countries will be spent on healthcare. The evidence suggests that many governments will be burdened with much higher healthcare costs from their citizens.

There are greater expectations around holistic care and the maintenance of good health. Such expectations complicate the already complex healthcare systems of countries such as for example the USA and Britain. Healthcare is essentially going to be a prime concern area for the foreseeable future and medical tourism is a natural extension of the globalization and information technology drive which currently exists and this will be expanded even further. In the recent past it was wealthy individuals from third world countries who checked into hospitals in Britain and the USA for the best quality healthcare available. The once huge gap between medical treatment in the developed and undeveloped world has shrunk and medical tourism in developing countries such as India has significantly increased. This can be, to a certain extent, explained by the fact that Indian doctors have and continue to study at the top medical schools around the world.

There is now a rapid trend reversal as patients from developed countries are seeking superior medical care in developing countries such as India. There are undoubtedly top notch medical facilities and practitioners around the world that patients try to identify by means of internet research and by word of mouth. It is not uncommon that numerous political leaders and others in Africa have visited South Africa to obtain the best possible medical treatment, but far more must be done if South Africa is to become a leader and sought after destination in medical tourism. One group of medical tourists travels abroad with the expectation of getting the best possible treatment which they can afford as they have the financial resources required for such an endeavour. A second group of potential medical tourists dreams of having top quality healthcare abroad in hospitals of note but they simply do not have adequate financial means to do so. This group has no option but to seek healthcare where their budget dictates. Clearly both patient types have a need to travel to seek healthcare and would indeed be willing to but in reality only one type can afford to do so. A variety of factors including financial means, domestic quality medical care availability, comparison with medical care abroad, personality type and timing of treatment considerations impact on medical tourism.

CHEAPER OFFERINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES

A British citizen may not be willing to wait for the National Health Service to provide needed care or may not be in a position to afford the services of a private practitioner. For such a person, low cost travel abroad for health purposes is the most logical choice provided that the type of treatment that is sought is available abroad. For an American, a trip abroad for medical purposes could be to obtain treatment at a fraction of the domestic tariff. Medical tourism was basically unheard of as an industry a decade ago, but is currently anticipated to become a $40 billion global industry by the second decade of this century. The imminent retirement of the baby boomer generation who is increasingly requiring affordable medical treatment and who is unable to find it at home will increase the global medical tourism industry profits drastically. The projection is that by 2015, the health of the Baby Boom generation will decline. There are well over 200 million Baby Boomers in the developed countries. This is clearly a huge market that South Africa's medical facilities should tap into. Of course those who are acutely ill or unable to fly abroad are not suitable candidates for medical tourism. It is estimated that the global medical travel industry currently generates annual revenues of up to about $55 billion, with a 20%-25% annual growth projection. About 1 million Americans travelled abroad for medical care in 2007, and this number is expected to exceed 6.5 million by about 2012. It is projected that medical tourist numbers will rise by 15% to 20% per year for the foreseeable future. McKinsey and Company, a global management consulting company who is the trusted advisor to the world’s leading businesses, governments, and institutions, has estimated that medical tourism gross revenues
were in excess of $40 billion worldwide in 2004, with projections of up to about $100 billion by 2012. This is a tremendous opportunity for South Africa’s medical and tourism industries.\[43\]

**INDIA’S MEDICAL TOURISM MARKET**

India is an important role player, and after Thailand, the leader in the field of medical tourism.\[14\] It is amongst a group of nations, mainly in the developing ones, that offers relatively inexpensive treatment for foreigners. This is notwithstanding its reputation as an impoverished country that is very often unable to maintain even the most basic hygiene for its own population of 1 billion people. Despite this, India is a very good option for medical tourism as it offers cheap top quality treatment in state-of-the-art private hospitals. In addition, India’s medical schools graduate between 20 000 and 30 000 highly trained and hyper efficient doctors and nurses every year. The government of India allocates hundreds of acres of land to construct medical centers of excellence that offer world class treatment and excellent medical packages to international patients at highly affordable rates.\[17\] Although India is a relatively late arrival to medical tourism when compared to Thailand for example, recent estimates indicate that the number of overseas patients seeking care in India is growing by about 30 percent each year.\[16\] It is estimated that about half a million foreign patients will travel to India for medical tourism in 2012. This is a marked increase on the 150 000 who traveled there in 2002. India anticipated to receive 300,000 medical visitors in 2007\[17\] but the number was 25% higher, and she has been enjoying a 30% growth rate annually. At this rate India will soon overtake Thailand as the leading medical tourism destination in the world.\[18\]

There is no singular global accreditation agency for medical care, but the accreditation granted by US based Joint Commission International (JCI) to many Indian hospitals, is an important indication of a medical service provider’s guarantee of top-notch healthcare and outstanding patient safety measures. Many Indian healthcare facilities also ascribe to the International Organization for Standardization’s (ISO) ISO 9001:2000 series. This is an effective management tool which provides a thorough operational framework to obtain control and consistency in all aspects of running a hospital including both technical and administrative aspects. This also attracts many foreign medical tourists, many of whom will be uninsured people with limited funds available and who require very specialized medical services such as dentistry, bone marrow transplants, cardiology and oncology. India’s clinics are also for the most part equipped with the latest medical diagnostic equipment. The cost of surgery in India can be far less than what it is in Britain, the United States or Western Europe and this increasingly appeals to India for specific procedures. Consequently, medical tourism may greatly impact on and alter the face of the future healthcare system in the USA. An added attraction to India is its vast technological superiority and infrastructure which allows it to maintain its niche market. The USA already has great faith in Indian medical practitioners’ abilities and 5% of all doctors in the USA are of Indian origin. Even Indian pharmaceuticals meet the rigorous requirements of the US Food and Drug Administration. India’s quality care surpasses that to be found in the USA in many cases. India stands to earn in the region of $2 billion through medical tourism by the end of 2012 and a projected $5 billion by 2015. In addition to this huge financial boost for the economy of India, the government will extend its Market development Assistance (MDA) scheme to cover the Joint Commission International (JCI) and National Accreditation Board of Hospitals (NABH) certified medical facilities.\[19\]

For the majority of medical tourists, though, the primary attraction is the affordability of procedures abroad. The southern Indian city of Chennai is considered to be the healthcare Mecca of India.\[19\] There are however many other cities that boast a large concentration of top quality medical facilities. New Delhi and Mumbai are two such cities. Mumbai, famed for Bollywood, is also the city with the greatest percentage of plastic surgeons, and is also a sought after destination for full body makeovers. Ironically, despite far lower prices than equivalent facilities in their home countries, the hospitals and clinics in India and other countries that cater to the medical tourist market are very often among the best in the world, and many of these are staffed by physicians who were educated in their craft at the top medical centers in the USA and elsewhere. The majority of hospitals in India where medical tourism reigns supreme are relatively new facilities and have exceptionally well-trained medical teams and an increasingly high turnover of patients from abroad.\[20\]

The very latest equipment is available and most medical centers have affiliations with the best medical institutes in other countries, such as Johns Hopkins and Harvard Medical. Given the fact that India was for many years a British ‘possession’, the relationship with Britain is particularly strong and many Indian doctors are trained in Britain and the USA, and are consequently highly proficient in English.

The Escorts Heart Institute and Research Centre, an example of a class of excellence in medical care that is difficult to beat globally. The Escorts Health Institute comprises a Cancer Centre, Heart Centre, Neurosciences Centre, Joint Replacement and Orthopedics Centre, Minimally Invasive Surgery Centre, a Bariatric Surgery Centre, a Renal and Transplant Centre, a Birthing Centre and a Critical Care and Pulmonology Centre. The Institute has 300 beds and is one of the most advanced surgical and medical facilities in the world. Each of the practices and research procedures followed at the hospital are research oriented and all services are clearly patient-centric, the emphasis being on service quality excellence. This is one of many world-class hospitals in India. There are many other outstanding hospitals in India that offer world class treatment and excellent medical packages to international patients at highly affordable rates.\[18\]
medical facilities that are worthy of mention in India. The PushpanjaliCrosslay Hospital in Ghaziabad, makes foreign patients and their families feel at home and offers customized care and multilingual services. It also has very specialized dietary services and teleconferencing with treating medical practitioners. The hospital specializes in Cardiology, Cancer care, Gynaecology, Neuro-surgery, IVF infertility and Laparoscopic surgery and many other areas. Dharamshila Hospital and Research Centre for cancer patients has set a new benchmark globally by providing highly innovative and very precise oncology radiology services. This hospital is a pioneer in head and neck cancer surgery which is aimed at restoring normal facial appearance and once again allowing churning, swallowing and speech thus ensuring a cancer free life for patients. Sir Ganga Ram Hospital which is in New Delhi has just under 700 beds and is highly successful in liver transplantation, bone marrow transplantation and pancreatic and gastrointestinal ailment treatments, to name but a few. Its highly advanced facilities and its affordability have made this hospital a favoured destination for medical tourism in India. Its patients emanate from various diplomatic missions in India, the USA, the Middle East and Europe.

India has an added advantage in that it has a long history of alternative medicine. This is also a popular attraction for many medical tourists. Post-operative patients seek to indulge in this by visiting an ashram or a retreat centre such as that in Rishikesh, in Himchal Pradesh. In such retreats, patients recuperating from traditional medicine, partake in yoga, meditation and even Ayurvedic treatments. Southern India is particularly renowned for its many quality Ayurvedic spas. India is undoubtedly among the world’s leading countries for biotechnology research. She is making huge advances in stem cell research at a level which only Britain currently exceeds. In addition to such advances, in the top Indian medical facilities, medical practitioners have at least two or more registered nurses to assist them. One nurse is dedicated to a single patient on a 24 hour basis. Patients are also accommodated in private wards that are akin to five star hotel rooms in most countries and their meals are very carefully planned by dieticians. In some cases, patients in the post-operative phase of care are also assigned a private assistant and provided with holiday vouchers to tourist sites in close proximity to the medical facility. It is projected that medical tourism could provide India with as much as an additional $2.2 billion per year by year-end 2012. The only real difficulty foreign patients could encounter when undertaking medical tourism to India is a rather elaborate VISA application process. Other than this, India is a world beater in quality medical service provision.

THAILANDS MEDICAL TOURISM

Since Thailand’s cost of living index is far lower than in the USA and Europe, it is a cheaper option for foreigners to visit for medical tourism and top quality care. In the last decade, over 1.4 million international patients have received medical treatment in Thailand, and the number is growing in leaps and bounds annually. Of these increasing medical tourists, some 200,000 people per year emanate from the USA and almost 100,000 patients fly to Thailand from the UAE and countries from the Middle East. Thailand is a popular destination for medical tourism because hospitals and other medical facilities in Thailand pride themselves on their exceptionally high standards, and most of them regularly subject their premises and systems to the most meticulous classification by applying for global accreditation and certification, and have medical facilities inspected regularly so as to determine that they meet a set of stringent standards and requirements which are all aimed at improving the service quality experience of their medical tourists. This is generally a voluntary process and provides a material and visible commitment by the medical facilities involved to continually guarantee a safe environment for their patients as well as for their staff who are, as in the case of India, generally trained at the best medical schools.

A great number of Thai doctors and surgeons have won awards for their innovative work and medical practice endeavors and in excess of 500 doctors practicing in Thai hospitals are American Board Certified. Thailand was the very first country in Asia to achieve the prestigious JCI accreditation in 2002. JCI sets Clinical Care Program Certification standards (CCPC), which are awarded to institutions demonstrating excellence in fostering better outcomes in specific clinical care services, or treatment of specific diseases and conditions, and to date 17 hospitals in Thailand have been accredited. The most prestigious include the Bangkok Heart Hospital, the Bumrungrad International Hospital, the Wattanosoth Cancer Hospital and the Yanhee Hospital. Four Thai hospitals have received CCPC ratings and are world leaders. As in the case of India, the cost of medical treatments in Thailand is appreciably lower when compared to identical treatments in developed countries. Treatments in Thailand are characteristically far less expensive than elsewhere in the world. For example, when compared to the USA $130,000 cost for a heart bypass procedure, the same procedure can be performed by highly skilled and well qualified doctors at a Thai hospital for only USA $11,000. A spinal fusion procedure in the USA could average at roughly $65,000 while in Thailand this will cost only $7,000. Cosmetic surgery procedures are 50% less expensive in Thailand than in the USA, where breast augmentation can cost $3,500-4,000 as opposed to $2,800-$3,000 in Thailand. Liposuctions are $2,500-3,000 in the USA instead of only $1,200 in Thailand. A root canal treatment that costs between $500 and $2,000 in the USA, will only cost about $170 in Thailand. Medical treatment in Thailand is usually obtained with the greatest of ease and there is usually very little time spent waiting for the scheduling of even the most highly complex and invasive procedures.

Hospitals possess state-of-the-art technology that assists them to provide the highest degree of medical treatment and services possible. For example, Thai technological equipment includes the Siemens Biograph 64 PET/CT, which is superior to other CT and MRI machines in early cancer detection and diagnosis and Image Guided Radiotherapy (IGRT), which is the most accurate technique for targeting radiation to cancerous tumours, and R2 CAD ImageChecker that has 6-20% higher breast cancer detection rates than standard CAD digital mammography, which allows for more accurate early detection and greatly assists in reducing the incidence of false positive testing which can be highly debilitating for patients, both women and men. Thai blood marrow stem cell transplants are a complex medical treatment procedure that can offer a cure for many otherwise untreatable blood or bone marrow diseases and certain other cancers in both adults and children. The top Thai surgeons use Gamma Knife Surgery, which allows for non-invasive brain surgery using highly targeted gamma radiation bursts. Even more
advanced is the da Vinci Surgical System, which makes use of robotics to convert a surgeon’s natural hand movements to apply less invasive incisions with unparalleled exactitude during heart surgery procedures. The list of the very latest medical innovative technologies found in Thailand is endless, and just a sample of what exists has been mentioned. In addition to medical technology, many medical facilities make use of fully automated drug management systems, picture archiving and communication systems to guarantee that administration and communication are as flawless as the procedures are.

Medical tourists to Thailand quickly feel at ease and gain the impression that they are simply special guests on holiday from the very first encounter at the hospital or airport to the time they depart for home.\textsuperscript{[21]} Patients are always pleasantly surprised to discover that Thailand’s medical facilities include the best restaurants and coffee shops as well as personalized room service not experienced anywhere else in the world. Thai hospitals offer facilities usually found in 5-star hotels, and patients from anywhere in the world can enjoy immaculate private rooms, translation services, room service including Kosher, Halaal and vegetarian and vegan prepared dishes. There is also usually a prayer facility of their faith and access to counselors if required. Hospital staff are very friendly and deeply concerned about the needs of all their patients, and never shy away from going the proverbial extra mile. There is 24-hour nursing care from multilingual staff, and many hospitals employ English speaking staff and many provide translators for many foreign languages, such as Arabic, French, German, Dutch, Italian, Korean, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Japanese, Russian and even Swahili. Medical tourists can also choose to spend recovery time from their treatment outside of the hospital in resorts or hotels, and so combine treatment with a vacation. Hospitals also provide a medical escort service wherever the patient requests this and thereby ensure expert, qualified and comprehensive medical care and attention while still recovering in the mountains of Thailand or in resorts in Phuket.

The Phuket Spa Association (PSA) has expressed the belief that the five-year strategies should be focused on surpassing world-class standards in both service and image. Consequently they suggest that all Thai spa, massage and health services should be further upgraded as the total revenue from Thai spa and massage services should account for a fifth of the total target of revenue by 2014. There are over 200 spa operators in Phuket. The Phuket healthcare sector has 1360 hospitals, and two-thirds of these are to be found in the public sector. The number of private hospitals, most of which were concentrated in these are to be found in the public sector. The number of private hospitals, most of which were concentrated in

Thailand as well as India are undoubtedly the leading global destinations for medical tourism that together accounted for around 90% of the total Asian medical tourism market in 2010.

A SNAPSHOT – MEDICAL TOURISM IN MALAYSIA AND CHINA (Birth Tourism)

The Ministry of Health (MoH) in Malaysia reported that in 2010 it received 400 000 healthcare tourists worth more than R300 million. As a result the MoH has urged the private sector to publish their rates on their websites, for both patient information and to avoid any misunderstanding and disputes that may ensue after treatment. It is estimated that this industry will be worth USA$5 billion in 2012.\textsuperscript{[22]}

In China long standing one child policies limit most urban Chinese families to one child. This has caused expectant mothers to travel to Hong Kong to give birth to dodge the ‘unfair’ system. An added advantage while Hong Kong was still under British political jurisdiction, was that the child born in Hong Kong would also acquire a new passport. This gave rise to an industry of birth tours run by operators who would charge up to USA$8000-00 including hospital fees.\textsuperscript{[23]}

WHAT MEDICAL TOURISTS SEEK ABROAD

Medical tourists seek top quality treatment at the medical facilities they visit while overseas.\textsuperscript{[24; 25]} They also need to know that they are legally covered when receiving care abroad and that their visits are kept confidential. This latter aspect is especially critical if the medical tourists are recognized global celebrities or political figures. They also need to feel comfortable with the practitioners they accept to treat their ailments and need to be convinced of the fact that the latest medical technology exists at their destination and will be used to assist their progression to better health. The food they are provided with while recuperating must meet the required dietary restrictions of their individual conditions. Given South Africa’s history, potential medical tourists must feel accepted irrespective of race, colour or creed. The greatest influence on the decision making process of the medical tourist is the issue of quality service. The result is that many medical centers replicate themselves on hotel models. They have a concierge, (Bumrungrad, 2008), chauffeur, hotel-like check-in processes, personal translators and many have recovery centers that remind one of a resort more than a hospital.\textsuperscript{[26]}

The main motivation for travel abroad by patients is the medical cost savings. However many patients also seek the opportunity to conduct sightseeing in a foreign country and wish to experience an exotic culture while receiving treatment for whatever condition they are having treated.\textsuperscript{[27]}

Tourists also seek visits to health spas as part of their package.\textsuperscript{[28]}

Consequently, many medical travel packages sold to tourists tend to include not only the medical treatment, but include transportation, personal assistance at the location, accommodation and a postoperative vacation and recovery time period at a tourism site or two.\textsuperscript{[29]}

It is a masterstroke in some countries that most recovery time in medical tourism locations is spent at nearby hotels.\textsuperscript{[30; 31]} In an International Passenger Survey (see table 1) of medical tourists in and from Britain, it is clear that the economic recession has had a great effect on both inbound and outbound medical travel. British patients are reducing their expenditure on discretionary healthcare such as dentistry and cosmetic surgery, but this has not stopped thousands from seeking cheaper quality healthcare abroad. Many potential medical
tourists are simply postponing treatment whether it is in Britain or overseas and this bodes well for South Africa’s medical tourism industry. [31]

Treatment Abroad carried out their survey of 650 British medical tourists by using an external market research company. Surprisingly, 97% of those surveyed said that they would go for treatment abroad again. 96% would definitely go back to the same provider and would recommend medical tourism to a friend or relative. [31]

A number of factors are expected to promote growth in medical tourism globally. The obvious factor that springs to mind is the fact that as people generally tend to live much longer now than ever before, more healthcare will be needed. It is particularly the growing financial burden on healthcare resources in developed countries as a result of the global recession that is promoting medical tourism. In addition to this, previously less developed countries now have greatly improved quality healthcare and medical technology which is often better than in developed countries.

MEDICAL TOURISM AND SOUTH AFRICA

Although medical tourism is currently somewhat obstructed by the Department of Health, private hospitals and hotels and resorts (especially those with spas), have huge potential to drive medical tourism. Following the outstanding example of India, South Africa has great possibilities when it comes to medical tourism. Although India is the prime example to emulate in this article it should be pointed out that medical tourism is also the main offering in other countries including Kenya, Malaysia, Thailand, Poland, Hungary, Columbia, Jordan and Costa Rica. Annually, Thailand has 1 million medical tourists, while India has 500 000 medical tourists. If South Africa could increase the number of medical practitioners and maintain her relatively good reputation for medical care she would be well placed to respond to the global boom in medical tourism. South Africa is able to be competitive and to be sustainable as a medical tourism destination of choice. This would be an important diversification of the South African tourism product. [32]

However, for the South African medical tourism to take off and be competitive with India, for example, it would be essential that social justice prevail, economic development be accelerated and environmental integrity be observed. South Africa could greatly enhance local prosperity by maximizing the contribution of medical tourism to the nation’s economic prosperity. Central government, while focusing on especially public hospitals should also support private medical facilities and hospitals to promote medical tourism as much needed extra foreign capital would flow into our economy. Private hospitals could also mutually support central government in its initiatives to offer health services. South Africa’s health system consists of a large public sector and a much smaller but rapidly-growing private sector where most of the medical tourism would be undertaken.

Healthcare in the country thus varies from the most basic primary health-care, which is offered free by the state, to the highly specialized latest available technology driven health services which are to be found in the private sector for those who can afford to pay for them.

The number of private hospitals and clinics in South Africa is growing steadily. Four years ago there were 161 private hospitals, with 142 of these in urban areas. To date there are 200 private hospitals of which at least 20 are world class facilities. The majority of health professionals, with the exception of nurses, are employed in private hospitals. With the public sector’s shift in emphasis from acute to primary healthcare in recent times, private hospitals have now begun to absorb many tertiary and specialist health services. [32]

South Africa is already somewhat competitive in medical tourism and it is a developing industry as many patients from nations such as Britain, USA, Western Europe and the Middle East are seeking treatment for a wide range of ailments in South Africa. When it comes to cosmetic surgery an American citizen could enjoy huge savings by seeking treatment in South Africa where a facelift that normally costs about $25,000 in the USA, costs only about $2,000 in excellent facilities in South Africa. South Africa already draws many cosmetic surgery patients, especially from Europe, and many South African clinics offer special treatment packages that include the supply of personal assistants, visits with trained therapists, trips to luxurious health spas, the
best post-operative care in luxury hotels and safari trips or other exotic vacation incentives. Due to the low rate of the South African rand on the foreign-exchange market, South Africa is a more desirable destination for many patients from especially Africa. Once it is realized in South Africa, that price needs to be coupled to excellent service quality in medical treatment, more private hospitals will begin to see an increased demand for non-medical services. These will necessarily include additional package offerings, such as booking of flights, travel arrangements and organizing of visas for patients, as well as hotel and resort bookings for post treatment relaxation and tourism initiatives.

While the public healthcare system in South Africa is somewhat in a transitional mode, the private sector is undoubtedly amongst the best in the world. Many private hospitals such as Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre (Private and University cooperation), Milpark Clinic, Garden City Clinic, Olivedale Clinic and Linksfield Clinic, amongst many others have state-of-the-art facilities and highly skilled medical practitioners. South Africa has approximately 247 private hospitals and 30334 beds. There are 12751 medical practitioners and specialists which are affiliated. One recalls that the first human heart transplant was conducted in South Africa in 1967 by the renowned specialist Dr. Christiaan Barnard. Cosmetic surgery, non-essential ENT, gastroenterology, orthopaedic surgery, hip replacements, cardiac procedures and specialised dental surgeries are all very popular medical tourist requests in South Africa. The Cape Town based company, Mediscapes, offers many relatively cheap surgical procedures without any waiting list. The company is setting the tone for the South African industry as its medical tourism packages generally include visa support; meet-and-greet on arrival; a private nurse; accommodation pre and post-operatively; and to top it all a luxury safari at the end of the stay. As global national healthcare systems become overburdened, South Africa will experience a surge in medical tourism.

Patients from abroad visiting South African for medical tourism will discover affordable and quality medical treatment. They can also enjoy recuperating in sunny South Africa. If tour operators and hospitals collaborate more, sales of medical tourism packages are bound to soar. There must be more marketing of travel packages targeted at the medical tourism niche. South Africa’s infrastructure is in any event superior to that of India and this is also an advantage. It is time that South Africa’s private clinics and hospital groups, and even medical specialists, begin to more vigorously market their exceptional services on the internet. As medical tourists require a period of convalescence before returning home, South African hospitals in close proximity to medical facilities are ideally placed to serve as an ‘aftercare’ facility. The medical tourists may typically require a recovery period ranging from a few days for minor surgery to perhaps weeks, for major procedures and then some seek spa facilities as an additional feature. It is high time that there is greater collaboration between hoteliers and medical facilities who can together greatly increase the number of tourists visiting South Africa. Hotel facilities must be made more appealing to medical tourists in their offerings and facilities.

**FACTORS THAT COULD BOOST MEDICAL TOURISM TO SOUTH AFRICA**

The fact that the global economy is very fragile at the current time and recession looms ever larger, especially in countries such as the USA, Greece, Spain, Italy, Ireland and Portugal, means that public sector spending is bound to be slashed and the health departments in these countries will bear the brunt of resulting financial cuts. Due to the wide range of medical advances people in developed countries generally tend to live longer than they did in the past and many governments will not be in a financial position to fund ongoing medical care for an older population. As a result of this inability, many of these elderly patients may opt to become medical tourists and South Africa is well placed to absorb some of them for specialized treatment. South Africa’s private hospitals are certainly on a par with the developed countries in terms of the quality of care they can make available and also have access to advanced medical technology. If South African hospitals obtain international accreditation for their facilities and quality of treatment, the doors will be open for medical tourism.

According to a Treatment Abroad Medical Tourism Survey 2007/8, which surveyed 650 British medical tourists, using an external market research company, 97% of medical tourists would go for treatment abroad again, 96% would definitely go back to the same provider and in addition, 96% would recommend it to a friend or relative. The most common dental procedures for patients travelling abroad from Britain are crowns, dental implants, bridges and veneers. The most common cosmetic surgery procedures for patients are breast augmentation, breast reduction, tummy tuck, liposuction and facelift. The most common elective surgery procedures are hip replacement, knee replacement, laser eye surgery and cataract removal. Given South Africa’s historical links with Britain, this is a market just waiting to be tapped into by local hospitals and clinics. Since the internet is the first source that people go to seek information about treatment and healthcare issues, South Africa must improve its internet marketing for medical tourism to both medical facilities and health spas where the latter industry has doubled in size in the last decade. It is imperative that countries seek new avenues to remain competitive in their tourism industries.

The health services groups that provide treatment to medical tourists in South Africa should gradually begin to see an increase in the number of medical tourists seeking their services. This will increasingly be the case as the global economic slump adversely affects many governments who are beginning to struggle with the huge demands on state health services with very limited budgets. It is also conceivable that many health insurance products that provide cheaper premiums based on medical treatment abroad will emerge in developed countries such as the USA and Britain. However, currently no international legal regulations for medical tourism practice exist. The issue of legal recourse for unsatisfactory treatment across international boundaries is a legally and undefined issue at the present time.

**A POSSIBLE TOURISM MODEL FOR SOUTH AFRICA**

South Africa has for many years had a reputation as a medical innovator with top notch healthcare in leading edge medical technologies. She also has the requisite medical expertise and value-for-money quality services that attract medical tourists. South Africa also has a well developed public and private hospital system although public health requires an urgent revamp. South African medical schools at universities such as the Uni-
A possible South African model for medical tourism must necessarily consider the following aspects:

1. Which hotels or resorts are best placed to serve medical tourism needs?
2. At what point do medical tourists such as those undergoing surgery whether minor or major, get moved from a hospital to a hotel or resort?
3. How far should hoteliers go to establish medical facilities on their properties?
4. How and when are medical tourist bills settled and is there insurance in this regard?
5. To what extent should hotel and resort staff be able to diagnose basic ailments and when should hotels provide a fully trained nurse to the patient? Is the facility wheelchair friendly?
6. Should hotels and resorts have additional treatment offerings at for example a hotel spa, such as the new development at Kloofzicht Lodge in Gauteng?
7. What sort of lifestyle treatment should be on offer at a hotel or resort with a spa?
8. If a patient is diagnosed at a clinic. For example, can he/she check into a hotel or resort rather than stay at the medical facility?
9. What follow-up care will be provided for the medical tourist?
10. Who does the marketing to medical tourists- the medical facility or the hotel/spa or both?
11. To what extent will marketing strategies have to change so as to be perceptually more appealing?
12. How will accompanying families of medical tourists be catered for? Do they stay at the same hotel or spa? Do they stay in the same section or wing of the hotel or spa as the patients?
13. Do patients have a dedicated restaurant in the hotel or do they dine in the general use restaurant/s?
14. To what extent should national government support medical tourism enterprises in South Africa?
15. To what extent should hotel or spa staff be multilingual to meet medical tourists’ needs?
16. Will hotels/spas provide a tourism desk for medical tourists from which reservations can be made by medical tourists for specific tourism packages and trips to game reserves, for example?
17. Who will determine which attractions should be marketed to medical tourists and how will they get to these? Which marketing approach for medical tourism should be used and how different should this be to traditional leisure traveler marketing?
18. How crime free and safe is the area in question for medical tourists?
19. How receptive is the local population likely to be to an influx of medical tourists?
20. What is the destination’s general ‘brand’ image currently like and would medical tourism per se complement it?
21. How is medical tourism likely to impact on traditional tourism visitation patterns?
22. Will medical tourism enhance the economic position of the area in general?
23. Which countries medical tourists should be targeted and why?
24. What is the psychographic profile of the medical tourist likely to be?
25. How accessible is the destination to these tourists at the present time?
26. What is the global general view of the concept of traveling abroad for medical care?
27. Are South Africa’s medical staff and hotel staff able to handle increased medical tourism?
28. Is our weaker currency likely to be a draw-card for medical tourism in the next decade?
29. Are we able to host a culturally diverse medical tourism population?
30. How will local and provincial governments be involved in developing the appeal of the destination?
31. How will quality care be measured? Is it based on patient survival after an operation, the number and/or complexity of complications that may arise after surgery, the risk of post-operative infection, the length of stay in the intensive care unit or perhaps the readmission rate or life expectancy post-surgery?
32. Which data will be used to account for patient risk when developing the appeal of the destination?
33. What is the source of data used to determine the outcomes of medical treatment?
34. Last but not least how right is the price and will we medical dollars stay in South Africa, specifically in the area in which the services were offered?
CONCLUSIONS

Medical tourism is rapidly growing globally for a myriad of reasons and will ultimately succeed or fail depending on the price, quality of medical care and hospitality services on offer to medical tourists. Many developing nations are hoping to capitalize on the vast potential of medical tourism. Many hospitals in South Africa have an extensive and impressive track record in attracting medical tourists and many of these have been involved in medical tourism long before the term medical tourism was even first coined. While they remain able to provide quality healthcare at competitive prices that will be attractive to many emerging markets for medical travel, much more can be done to increase the amount of medical tourists coming to South Africa. This article has attempted to identify a model for South African medical tourism. By examining the extent to which certain areas in the model have been addressed it is hoped that a more comprehensive framework may be developed to assist in systematizing future medical tourist studies the aim of which will be to promote medical tourism to South Africa. Ultimately, South African medical tourism facilitators must play a greater role in the development of a new and more efficient medical tourism market and this article will provide invaluable guidelines that they can follow as they venture even deeper into the global medical tourism markets and may assist them in devising appropriate strategies.

REFERENCES
