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Medical tourism in Greece: The development factors

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Abstract

Medical Tourism is one of the oldest types of tourism, as it originates from ancient Greece. However, in recent years it has been growing more and more in about sixty countries in the world. Ranking Greece in the forty third (43th) place worldwide and ninth (9th) in Europe, claiming a significant share in this market. Based on a bibliographic review, the current research classifies concepts and definitions concerning the industry of medical tourism. More specifically, it focuses on the factors that motivate international patients to travel for medical care outside the borders of their country, as well as the factors that attract them and influence their final decision as to the destination of their choice. The picture of medical tourism in Greece today has been captured, and a SWOT analysis has been performed. Results have been documented, examined, and appraised. In the context of this investigation, the aforementioned conclusions were drawn from secondary literature research.

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Introduction

Medical tourism is now an important part of the of the global economy in the last 15 years. But before making an extensive analysis of the term it would be appropriate to make a historical background for a better and more complete understanding of the question. Medical tourism has its roots in the depths of history, times in which medicine was inextricably linked to religion. The Sumerians in 4000 BC created the first medical centres around thermal springs.

Medical science has a strong and long tradition in Greece. Read more in particular the construction of temples in honour of the god Asclepius, the so-called Asclepias, around Greece and the pilgrimage of believers to them in order to ask God to heal them. In 300 BC other temples evolved into medical centres such as Delphi, Epidaurus, the Temple of Olympian Zeus etc.

In the Middle Ages the medical tourism activity remained in a stagnant state. In Asia, medical tourism started with a focus on the thermal springs. Yoga and Ayurvedic medicine were developed around 5000 years ago in India as alternative forms of medicine.

The Renaissance (14th-17th century) was a period of flourishing not only of the arts and medical tourism. Seaside locations in the UK (such as Blackpool and Margate) attracted the social class, due to the healing properties of seawater and the air.

Medical tourism boomed in central Europe (Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland), around thermal springs of area, because the water was used therapeutically in skin diseases, rheumatic diseases and poor diet. That was the first time he made the appearance of "spa" (from the Latin spa = salute per aqua), an abbreviation of of the phrase 'health through water', when rich sources of water were discovered iron in the village of Ville d'Eaux, (the village of water), which acquired great popularity (among the visitors are the Great Peter and Victor Hugo).

In the post-Renaissance era, in America, the origins of the medical tourism in the New World are located in the hot springs, around from which British and Dutch settlers gathered around 1600 A. D. With the flourishing of indigenous botany contributed to the application of this knowledge in medicine. In the 19th century rich Europeans tribesmen traveled the southwestern United States, looking for better climatic conditions.

During the 20th century, Europe and America held the most important world leadership in medical science. In 1933 the American Board of Medical Specialties, an association designed to organize doctors in the US and to standardize procedures for obtaining medical licenses knowledge and practice of medicine.

In the 1960s the social movements (flower children, hippies) have turned interest to India and alternative forms of medicine, while in the following decades ('80-'90), patients were looking for markets developing countries for economic reasons. Typical is the study by Lee *et al.*, 52 which after content analysis of the websites of 91 medical tourism agents, the results show that the websites emphasise the advantages without an analysis of what might be a serious complication that could show some intervention.

They thus create a very an attractive package of services to the would-be consumer. A report compiled by the World Trade Organization and published in Bookman & Bookman, 2007 states that, the globalisation and the current environment that has been shaped determines to a large extent the development of tourism services at international level. This form of tourism is an opportunity for economic development, especially for developing countries that take full advantage of the favourable international framework and invest in the creation and promotion of a competitive medical tourism supply. It is typical that in the USA, where health care costs are care continues to increase, many are those who are in need of constant search for destinations outside the country where they can receive quality healthcare at much lower cost. Calculated that in 2016, around 16 million travellers left the country, seeking affordable healthcare in various countries. With some projections for the near future show that this number is constantly will increase. Medical Tourism refers to residents of a country who travel to other countries in order to gain access to medical, dental and surgical services of equal or higher quality quality than they would receive in their own country and travel to the medical care due to affordability, easier access in health services or a higher level of quality of service provision health.

Literature Review/Methodology

For the purpose of our research, we have reviewed a significant number of published studies. The literature on this topic was studied thoroughly in order to create and compile a

scientific study around this major problem. Both from the international and domestic literature, important results could be drawn.

Results and Findings

According to the Deloitte 2009 survey, medical tourism there is a categorization into three (3) categories, domestic, Inbound and outbound medical tourism. Domestic Medical Tourism refers to travellers of the same nationality who move within the country in order to receive medical services.

- 1) Inbound Medical Tourism, refers to patients coming from foreign countries with the aim of receiving specialized medical care
- 2) Outbound Medical Tourism, refers to all tourists moving outside the country to meet their needs to medical care.

While an opposite approach of the OECD, distinguishes between the of mobile patients, separating medical tourists from the set of the remaining patients. This categorisation includes, personal visitors to foreign countries, long-term residents in a foreign country, either because of occupational needs or retired persons, persons who are not move to neighbouring countries because of bilateral relationship of their hometown to provide medical care, and those who have chosen to entrust their medical care to a health care provider abroad.

According to OECD estimates, medical tourists are those who choose to move driven by medical needs, as well as choose to burden the themselves from the cost of those services and benefits. The success of medical tourism is based on a number of benefits and advantages that it offers both for visitors who make use of and for the destinations that offer this particular service, as well as for the service. The most important benefits resulting from medical tourism for the destination countries are summarised below. Medical tourism as a product is very attractive and improves the image of the host country at international level, while upgrading the its performance in the tourism sector in general. This sector offers the opportunity to engage in a completely new way of working new market since a large part of the visitors previously could not to move around and enjoy holidays and leisure, as was the case for example of people with disabilities and kidney patients.

Offering medical tourism lengthens the tourist season, since it is offered throughout the year, thereby reducing the seasonality factor.

It is a fact that medical tourism attracts visitors from developed countries belonging to a high income level. Any visitor generates twice as much revenue for the host country, since it is rarely a patient travels alone and almost always has a companion with them. So not only does he and his companion spend, with the result that the revenue for the country to be for at least two. It is widely known that medical tourism attracts and multinational companies abroad that have targeted investments, with resulting in increased entrepreneurship in the host country. The development of medical tourism is an incentive for local operators in order to upgrade local clinics and to move forward with the hospitals in the field of the technology used, the facilities and the level of service provided to staff. Operates as a stimulant to the local economies and helps to stimulate medical tourism further development of the regions. Through medical tourism, a reduction in the number of unemployment as it

creates new jobs of various specialities with resulting in full utilisation of scientific staff.

In addition to the benefits for the host country, equally important are the benefits for the visitor-patient. And more specifically we could say: The visitor receives the same or similar service at very low prices compared to his country. This factor turns out to be great incentive since a large percentage of patients do not have any insurance health, resulting in the cost of treatment within the country's borders to be prohibitive for their financial circumstances. The cost is made even more attractive, since the package of medical service combines airline tickets, meals and hotels at amounts below the corresponding service offered in the patient's country.

Through medical tourism, the treatment process becomes more efficient pleasantly, since patients feel better psychologically when are in a climate of leisure and relaxation.

There are also some cases where patients wish to travel far away in order to avoid their acquaintances and relatives even as for example in cases of plastic surgery.

Medical tourism offers the time-saving opportunity, since the modern pace of life shrink citizens' leisure time. So the limited time is excellently combined with health care and holidays.

In addition to advantages medical tourism has a number of from disadvantages that affect both the host countries and the visitors. For the destination countries the most important negatives are:

The industry is making great demands on the investment, since in order for a country to become a popular investment destination, it is necessary to medical destination will have to invest large sums in promoting services, infrastructure and state-of-the-art medical technology. You need to find and private individuals with the appropriate financial level to make the investments and create Health Tourism Centres with excellent health and wellness level of equipment and staff facilities.

In countries such as Greece, without a clear legislative framework and with the risk of economic uncertainty there is no room and no incentives for such kind of investments. Besides, it is a fact that large investments they also carry high risks in case of failure.

A major risk is the unavailability of strong certification quality and health regulations from the country of destination, while from distance it is difficult to recognize whether expectations are equal to the quality and reliability of the medical service offered by the medical centers. In the absence of a competent organisation, the visitor must make a great personal effort to seek from the itself the appropriate accreditations and certifications of each medical center, but also the appropriate destination, so that you are absolutely sure for the conditions he will encounter.

It is a fact that a patient's health insurance often does not cover medical services provided in foreign countries so that it is not clear what the final cost is that is required to pay and at what rate of participation.

Medical tourism is expanding more and more rapidly, both qualitatively and quantitative. The market is constantly growing with more and more people to choose a different country - medical service provider from the country in which they reside, while the variety of services medical tourism and their quality are increasing. In this rise an important role is played by the present circumstances, both socially and

nationally, and globally.

The factors that contribute to growth medical tourism

- The development of travel, with the variety of transport modes means (by air, rail, etc.), and the simultaneous reducing the cost of these
- Legislative facilitation of transnational travel (visa, the Schengen Treaty etc.) but also legal differences between countries in relation to medical services (e. g. abortions, etc.).
- The globalisation of knowledge and skills and the dispersion of knowledge the know-how
- Changing social norms (removing taboos)
- The scientific advances that have made it possible to find more diseases
- The demographic composition of the world population
- The economic situation at international level (rising middle class in Asian countries, etc.)
- The development of medical infrastructure in destinations that already constituted tourist options
- Professional mobility
- The evolution of the science and methods of marketing

Quality assurance of medical tourism services is of exceptional importance for the promotion of the product, its establishment and its future use.

The international certification of health care facilities is the key characteristic feature that health care facilities and health care facilities must have tourism in order to become competitive and very competitive in the more to the preference of medical tourists in the international formation. The term Quality Assurance (QA) refers to the planned and systematic activities implemented in a quality management system in order to comply with the specifications laid down for a product manufactured or for a product service produced. Quality control, focused on the evaluation of and the assessment of the result of the production process or the the process of providing a service.

The concept of accreditation/certification includes the confirmation of the conformity of the procedures followed by a organization in the production and marketing of goods to international standards safety and quality, by an external certification body. And more in the case of health services in particular, compliance with safety and quality standards are of fundamental importance, as properties that ensure safety and quality are inherent properties of the product. There can't be a service that doesn't keep up with valid and modern scientifically confirmed standards.

Accreditation and certification systems shall be structured in such a way that manner so as to provide the objective measurements and estimates in the external evaluation framework and quality management systems. Accreditation Schemes should have at the heart of their assessment primarily the patient and the patient management process through the health system. This whole process involves how to access to care, its clinical management and care for the post-hospital care, as well as the quality of the supportive services provided to it.

When we talk about accreditation we should not have in mind control on the part of the government, but rather the opposite as all accreditation teams should assess the hospital's hospital services <holistically>, and not just some individual aspects of hospital activities.

Today there are a number of certification companies which

are unique in terms of the corporate history, objectives, activities, the composition of boards and standards and procedures standardisation and certification that follow. Their action is complementary but also competitive depending on the scope of action of the health services

Speaking of international and national bodies, reference is made to bodies which have an impact on tourism development at international level, national and regional. Their main occupation is the formation of legal and institutional framework in the entire tourism field and in every sector of tourism its individual part.

The international organisations included in the section are, for example, national organisations, the relevant ministries (Tourism, Development, Health), ambassadors and insurance institutions and, more generally, anything that may contribute to in the promotion and promotion of medical tourism in certain destinations.

In 2012 Gang and Bhardwaj concluded that lead to medical tourism, i. e. the demand for medical tourism as a product in the client and a potential patient.

They claim that these trips motivated by the internet, progressively cheaper flights, the improved physical connectivity between countries, increasing longevity and especially frustration with the provision of healthcare, in terms of is about quality and price in the countries where they live. "

According to research conducted by Mc Kinsey in 2008 in a sample of 49,980 medical tourism patients access to technologically modern medical services (40%), and quality (32%) of the health services provided are the most important factors determining the demand for medical tourism services. H direct access (15%) and low cost (9%) of services, also emerge as structurally important reasons for demand.

Many studies have investigated the motivations that drive patients to seeking healthcare abroad, focusing on the existing demand and supply.

Demand for cross-border healthcare is identified in the more cases with problems and shortcomings in the country origin such as: increased health costs lack of insurance bureaucracy long waiting lists in public bodies health for specific procedures/treatments

The offer includes the following: the reputation of the medical staff and health units, certification of health units staffing with highly qualified medical personnel high quality medical services in another country better information for patients

greater mobility due to the development of low-cost airlines cost easy access to internet as a gateway to a plethora of information favourable exchange rates familiarity and proximity (geographical distance, cultural familiarity, language, religion, story Medical tourism contributes to the economic situation of a country, which is the main means of a traditional tourist destination. Greek society responded immediately to the development and enrichment, on the issue of alternative tourism in the country. In the context of that Greece followed and responded to the new tourism trends which automatically put traditional tourism in recession and in a climate of competition that had developed in the other Mediterranean countries, such as Spain and Portugal

The main form of tourism, which is growing more and more and which is now, provided by all destinations in the audience, is medical tourism. In Greece are constantly developing and new opportunities are emerging in this sector,

since Greece is the birthplace of the medical science and has a number of scientists who offer important information to the scientific community. Greece has important tourist advantage, since it is among the most popular destinations mainly because of its climate, which makes it particularly attractive.

According to a study by the prestigious international organization McKinsey & Co, entitled "Greece 10 years ahead", which was commissioned by the Association (SEV) in cooperation with the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises and Industries (SEV).

Banks, medical tourism is one of the eight types of medical tourism industries that could help the development of Greece in the future.

These are industries which are not yet developed adequately, but they can contribute in the future to the development of the Greece. Greece has a prominent position internationally with regard to the high quality training and specialisation of its medical staff. Greece ranked on the tables for producing better doctors internationally according to the medical forum Faculty of Medicine.

Greece has the advantage of having a large number of medical services, with the corresponding infrastructure at its disposal. In these infrastructures and services belong to the hospital institutions with modern facilities and the necessary equipment. Increasingly, the number is growing tourism services, strengthening medical tourism. In recent years Greece has seen an increase in tourism figures.

The development of the tourism market in the country is the result of factors such as a strong tourism policy, competitive measures and the ability of the private sector to adapt to a rapidly changing market in the required time. Medical tourism is still in a state of very early stage in Greece and has not received adequate attention both from the tourism industry and from various stakeholders. Greece is among the group of countries that participate in the growing global medical travel market.

It is considered a very safe destination and the beauty of its landscape is country, combined with other factors such as abundant sunshine, the healing thermal natural springs and the unique Mediterranean cuisine, make the country a point of choice for many medical travellers

In Greece there can be a development of medical tourism if succeeded and relied on the following factors:

- The natural and cultural heritage that Greece offers.
- The marked variations that it presents in its environment Greece with its unparalleled beauty
- The continuous increase in tourist flows.
- The Mediterranean lifestyle and diet
- The development of technologies in communications but also in iT in infrastructure and the medical sector.
- There is a large supply of qualified and competent medical personnel staff.
- Affordable salaries for health staff

The offer of health services of medical tourism is sporadic and individual. The medical tourism sector is at a very early stage in our country, while in other countries in Europe the sector flourishes and makes huge profits. The individual actions of entrepreneurs come purely from private initiatives, without the support of the state apparatus. Instead of creating fertile ground, the state hinders its development with a lack of flexibility due to bureaucracy and the lack of a specific

legislative framework Greece can and has all the necessary tools for development of medical tourism but also to become a popular destination. The our country apart from the ideal climatic conditions and the excellent natural environment, has very sophisticated medical equipment, a lot remarkable medical and nursing staff, excellent technological infrastructures, as well as new treatment methods and techniques for recovery of any health problems. Of course it has excellent hotel complexes, which reach and often exceed foreign hotels.

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