

PROSPECTS IN MEDICAL TOURISM IN GEORGIA- CHALLENGES, AND BARRIERS IN HEALTHCARE SECTOR

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Nations' governments around the world have foreseen significant economic development potential in the emergent industry of medical tourism. Moreover, medical tourism is a source of lucrative foreign revenue for the countries inducing growth of economy, an opportunity to participate in global healthcare, to have better healthcare standards, to enhance the development of technically advanced and specialized medical services, better knowledge exchange, turn around brain drain – chance to retain or bring back local healthcare professionals, more political benefits, social benefits. Because of these reasons, medical tourism direction attracted interest of large hospitals, in Georgia, as well.

According to experts' opinions, Georgia has great potential and perspectives in medical tourism and in wellness tourism, as well. Country's healthcare sector is indeed competitive in number of medical services (cardio surgery, plastic surgery, dentistry etc.); private clinics have excellent success rates regarding these medical services, state-of-the-art equipment, qualified health professionals and big experience. Moreover, in above-mentioned directions the country is price-competitive vs. other regional medical tourism destinations like Turkey and the UAE [7]. Considering these factors and its geographical location at the cross road of Europe and Asia Georgia has a potential to become medical tourism hub in Transcaucasia and in the region.

To overview tourism sector in Georgia, the total number of international visitors (tourists, transit and one-day arrivals combined) increased at a CAGR of 21.7% over 2008-17 and reached a record 7.5mn persons in 2017 [8]. Traditionally, visitors to Georgia have been more frequently from CIS countries and Turkey. However, arrivals have increased significantly from the Middle East and Iran in last years.

Moreover, number of tourists visiting Georgia is increasing drastically, in last years. To illustrate, in January-march of 2019, number of touristic visits in Georgia was 882,130, by 42,890 greater compared to the same period of 2018 (growth rate +5.1%; Source) [9].

Visitors from EU, Ukraine, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Kazakhstan continue growing strongly. Notably, visitors from the EU were up 23.4% y/y to over 73k visitors, with Netherlands (43.7%/y/y) Germany (+27.1%/y/y) and Poland (+31.6%/y/y) driving growth.

Furthermore, tourism development is one of the key areas in reforms that Georgian government introduced in 2016. And one of the aims of planned reforms is development of different types of tourism – medical as well. Even more, in January 2019, Georgia's prime minister publicly declared country's strategic directions in medical tourism- cardio surgery, plastic surgery and dentistry.

Georgia's hospital sector is mostly private, 87% of country's hospital bed stock is owned by private clinics. However, hos-

pital sector is highly fragmented, showing prevalence of small, asset-rich but cash-poor healthcare facilities, whose owners do not communicate among each other and often lack expertise in healthcare management on a stand-alone basis [13]. Moreover, Georgia's Universal Health Coverage financing system cannot be considered lucrative for the provider sector. Georgia has low – 35.7% hospital bed occupancy rate [16] suggesting capacity underutilization. Therefore, management in hospital sector faces problems to raise funds for investing in quality improvement or for innovative medical services' development. Consequently, one of the best solutions of these problems is to develop medical tourism in Georgia.

Enhancing medical tourism can attract high-yielding visitors in the country. Currently, medical tourism in Georgia is in the development stage. However, private clinics' efforts in search of potential "source countries" and attracting medical tourists is fragmented, not governed on the system level, totally relying on hospital sector and mediator firms, making it precarious with regard to patient safety and detrimental for Georgia's image as a destination country, on the global market.

The vast majority of research in the field of medical tourism is focused on the components of the medical tourism market, on the patient's decision making, pull/ push factors and motivation theories, whilst hardly can be found any information focusing on the influential factors, needs for implementation and development of medical tourism in a country, barriers etc.

Material and methods. The objective of this research was to explore the potential and perspectives of Georgia in medical tourism, in the scope of healthcare facilities, medical services and customer service and to identify barriers and challenges for medical tourism development in Georgia, for healthcare sector, as well as, on the system level.

Consequently, availability, accessibility and quality of medical tourism's most demanded medical services was assessed, in Georgia's healthcare sector; availability of qualified, relevant for medical tourism healthcare professionals (including specialty and expertise in the scope of cross-cultural communication).

The research question was formulated as – does Georgia have perspectives in medical tourism and what are the barriers that hinder medical tourism development in the country? What are the major challenges country has to respond to in this direction?

At the first stage, Narrative Review was performed. For this reason, HINARI, IOM, NCBI, PubMed, Google Scholar, Elsevier scientific article bases were utilized. In total, 160 articles were found and among them 140 were counted to be relevant.

In line with the research goals, qualitative study - in-depth interviews - were conducted. Overall, 37 semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with major stakeholders of

Table 1. Overview of Georgia's tourism sector

	International visitors	Tourists	Revenues	Revenue to GDP
2018	7.2 mn	4.8 mn	\$3.2 bn	19.9%
2014	5.0 mn	2.9 mn	\$1.8 bn	10.8%

Source: Galt&Taggart, August, 2019 [2]

medical tourism industry. In particular, medical services that are most demanded by medical tourists, in Georgia, were identified. Likewise, hospitals mainly engaged in identified directions were selected- multi-profile, plastic/cosmetic, reproductive, cardiologic, dental and oncologic specialty clinics. Moreover, in-depth interviews with their top managers were conducted. Among selected respondents were representatives of local and international medical tourism mediator/facilitator companies, government officials from Ministry of Healthcare, tourism department and Partnership Fund; the president of Medical Tourism Association, President of Medical Tourism Council, Temos International's representative and international experts of this field.

The structured part of interviews was focused to explore potential of healthcare facilities regarding medical tourism, competitors, needs, barriers, and the most demanded medical services, problems existing in the hospital sector and on the system's level, needed support from the Government etc. Respectively, interviews were audio-recorded, transcripts made and analyzed via NVIVO software and structured.

From the literature, evidence shows that external factors in the destination country such as political, economic, socio-cultural and other have considerable impact on medical tourism development. For the purpose to scan general environment and analyze impact of external factors on medical tourism development in Georgia PESTEL (Political, Economical, Socio-economical, Technological, Environmental and Legal) analysis tool was used. Furthermore, to assess Georgia's position on the international medical tourism market and with regard to competitors SWOT analysis was performed.

Based on identified needs, barriers and challenges for medical tourism development from the literature and findings of interviews (situational analysis) gap analysis was performed. Consequently, recommendations were elaborated for the healthcare sector and for the Government.

Results and discussion. At the present time, medical tourism is in the development stage in Georgia, it is not governed or regulated on the system level and only relies on fragmented efforts of private clinics and mediator firms. Thus, it contains risks with regard to foreign patient safety and image of Georgia as a destination country on the international medical tourism market.

Assessment of the general environment for medical tourism development in Georgia was performed using PESTEL analysis tool. Each aspect/field of this assessment is discussed briefly, below:

Political: political environment of the country is one of the most important factors for medical tourism development. In this regard, Georgia has advantageous position and as specialists appraise this is the main reason of sharp increase in tourist numbers in latest years. However, tensed relations with Russia reflect negatively in this regard.

Economical: experts give positive evaluation to Georgia's economic growth trend. According to the World Bank's "Doing Business Ranking", in 2019 Georgia occupied sixth position, as a country offering beneficial environment for investment. Moreover, based on their appraisal Georgia maintains strong position in Top 10 Economies and as a most trustworthy economy in Europe and Central Asia, [4]. Country offers favorable terms for investing in healthcare sector, as well. Furthermore, the banking sector is highly developed, in Georgia. Though, interest rates are not low, credits for financing expansion, development, technological equipping of medical facilities is accessible. This was illustrated from interviews as well, as vast majority of respondents (99%) is using this opportunity to expand medical busi-

ness. Another attractive factor for medical tourists (and for tourists in general) is favorable exchange rate in this country. Thus, prices on treatment, a cost of leaving, travelling and touristic attractions is low for them.

Social: Georgia is historically known for its high tolerance in cultural and religious scope. Citizens of the country are favorably disposed towards tourists, are open and communicable. Culture, traditions, cuisine make Georgia attractive for medical tourism development. As the research shows, greatest target for medical tourism and major "source countries" are post soviet-union countries. For these people Georgia is familiar and has cultural proximity.

Technological: Georgia's healthcare sector is quite well developed technologically. The vast majority of medical facilities in Georgia's capital and big cities are equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and this was confirmed in scope of research as well (during interviews with top management of clinics and info tours in hospitals).

Environmental: Georgia has very favorable geographical location – at the crossroad of Europe and Asia. Moreover, this factor is emphasized by medical tourism facilitator companies' executives during interviews when being asked "why did you choose Georgia for your medical tourism business?" Likewise, the same factor is named in the case of Turkey, as a very significant reason for their medical tourism success. Georgia has very favorable, soft climate, moderate moistness etc.

Legal: According to opinions of specialists of the field, legal framework in this regard is outdated and needs to be changed. At present, only small part of Georgian doctors/specialists have malpractice insurance. However, the loose legal framework is favorable for some medical tourism directions, such as assisted reproductive services. In many countries egg donation, surrogacy and in some countries even in vitro fertilization is prohibited by law. For instance, in Sweden, Norway, Austria, France, Germany and in several states of USA surrogacy is punishable. Consequently, Georgia's attractiveness for these services is increasing sharply in recent years. According to unofficial statistics (due to sensitivity of the issue it is subject to confidentiality), more than 3000 babies were born in years 2004-2018 (*data is provided by Service Agency of Georgia, in scope of research*). Moreover, based on the statistics provided by one of the respondents of the research, their hospital's revenue from assisted reproductive services provided to foreign patients in last three years was 2 million Gel (~\$909 100).

Visa related bureaucracy and complicated procedures are named among existing barriers in medical tourism industry. In case of Georgia, visa-free regime or simplified visa related procedures with many countries (post-soviet union countries as well) is another reason of attractiveness for medical tourists (source: Governmental Commission of Migration Issues of Georgia). Another analysis was performed using SWOT tool to assess Georgia's strengths, opportunities, threats and weaknesses in medical tourism and to evaluate strategies for its development.

One of the main research questions was – which factors, motivators shape patients' decisions to travel to Georgia for treatment? All respondents provided the same explanation – optimal combination of price and quality. Patients from bordering countries and from post Soviet Union countries arrive for better medical quality. However, quality of treatment is higher in Turkey, but since costs of traveling and treatment are higher as well, these patients prefer Georgia instead of travelling to Turkey. In case of Armenian patients, price is the determinant of

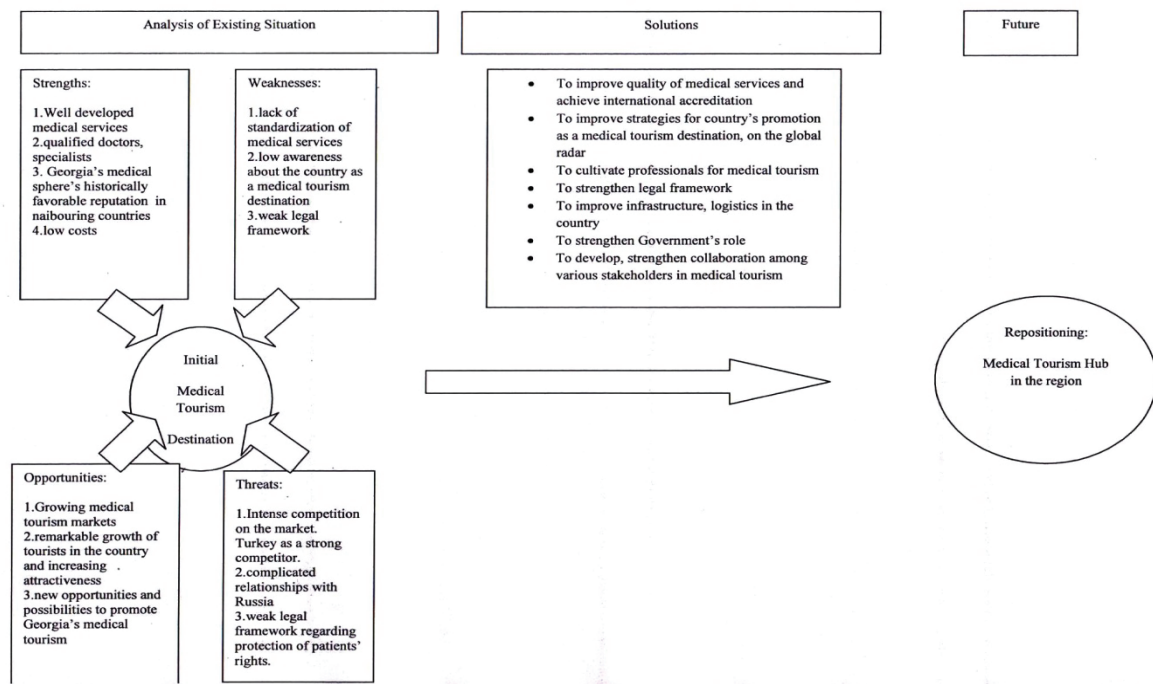


Fig. SWOT analysis

travel. Medical services are well developed in Armenia, especially cardio surgery and plastic surgery, but prices for treatment are higher. Different is motivation in case of assisted reproductive services. Patients travel to Georgia because of liberal legislation, as these services are prohibited in many countries. Recently, growing number of patients arrive from China and Israel for this reason.

Currently, greatest number of medical tourists arrives from Azerbaijan, Chechnya, North Ossetia, and Ingushetia. Recently, increasing number of patients arrive from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan. Medical providers are working to attract patients from Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan etc. For assisted reproductive services (mainly surrogacy) patients come to Georgia from every part of the World, from very distant countries. To illustrate, statistical data – number of foreign patients in years 2017-2019 (three years, by countries and by service types) - was requested from respondent health facilities. However, only nine clinics (seven multi-profile clinics and two reproductive clinics) were able to provide requested information. Based on this statistical analysis, a total number of patients arrived from Russia was 9015 (33%), from Azerbaijan – 8295 (30%), from Armenia – 1589 (6%) and 8216 (31%) from other countries. According to the literature review, the key differences of modern medical tourism industry (compared with the previous times medical tourism) are a reversal of the flow from developed to less developed nations, more regional movements- emergence of regional hubs, and the emergence of an international market. As the above-mentioned statistical analysis shows, regional movement is observable in Georgia, as well. However, in case of assisted reproductive service providers, situation is totally different. As a statistical analysis demonstrates that: 23% of foreign patients arrived for assisted reproductive services, in Georgia, in three years (2017-2019) was from China, 15% - from USA, 14% - from Israel, 7% - from Sweden, 4%- from Australia, 4% - from India and 33% from other countries.

To concentrate on barriers of medical tourism in Georgia, first of all, respondents name - Georgia not being positioned, as a medical tourism destination country, on global market. Moreover, awareness about the country, its healthcare sector, quality of medical services is low globally, even in post Soviet Union countries. And it became apparent for hospitals working separately to attract foreign patients, that individual efforts are not enough and ineffectual unless the country is perceived as a medical tourism destination. As evidence shows, to position country as a destination and to develop medical tourism direction Government's active involvement and strong role is vital. Regrettably, Georgia's government is not involved in this direction at a needed extent, this issue is not found in agendas of any of the ministries.

The most frequently mentioned demand factors for medical tourism in the literature are the relatively high cost of medical care in the origin country [3] and the quality of medical care in comparison with that of the destination country [10]. As far as supply factors are concerned, hospital accreditation [6], geographical distance and cultural familiarity emerge as important determinants of destination country selection in the literature by patients [10]. According to the literature, though low cost is an important trade-driver, it cannot be realized by sacrificing quality [12]. Since, quality is difficult to assess after an intervention (posteriori), therefore, it is frequently evaluated via accreditation before an intervention (a priori). Medical tourism markets have seen affiliation through franchising with well-known medical centers. To illustrate, the Cleveland Clinic owns facilities in Canada and Abu Dhabi [2]. Such marketing tries to persuade and profit from global branding [1]. Accreditation can play an important signaling role. There has recently been an increase in developing country provider accreditation aimed at aiding medical tourism growth. Some governments – including India, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia – actively encourage accreditation of their healthcare facilities [14]. This kind of accreditation also aims to ensure good quality health services for their

own citizens. For instance, Dubai Health Care City (DHCC) was established to try and persuade Middle Eastern medical tourists to receive treatment in their region instead of travelling to Asia. Furthermore, Turkey which can be named as Georgia's competitor in the region, is one of the leaders in the world by the number of JCI (Joint Commission International) accredited clinics. And experts of the field correlate Turkey's success in medical tourism with high number of accredited medical facilities. According to sources in literature, international accreditation has vital importance in patients' decision making process and for customer satisfaction. Even more, they call it "ticket to participate" in this industry [11].

However, in Georgia, according to results of the presented research, international accreditation is not demanded from medical tourists or partner medical tourism facilitator companies. This can be explained by the fact, that in the majority of source countries from where medical tourists travel to Georgia awareness about international accreditation is low. Currently, there is only one hospital in Georgia, which owns JCI accreditation and another hospital is in the process of accreditation. Only one-third of the respondents of this research think that international accreditation is necessary. However, even if hospital's management realizes importance of international accreditation and has strong desire to acquire it, it is very complicated and nearly impossible for most hospitals in Georgia to meet these standards. To illustrate, one reason for this is physical environment of hospitals. Majority of hospitals in Georgia are operating in old, soviet-union period buildings, which is far from JCI standards. Despite the above-mentioned, newly launched Medical Tourism Council of Georgia plans to work with member clinics and facilitate process of seeking international accreditation, since it is required for collaboration with international funds and insurance companies.

Regrettably, the medical tourism industry is facing more and more challenges as a number of newcomers, who might have little experience and understanding of the industry, are jumping on medical tourism bandwagon simply to make a profit without looking at the potential medical and wider reputational risks of a country [5]. Current evidence suggests that poor outcomes are attributable to substandard surgical care, infections that in at least some circumstances are a result of inadequate infection control measures in surgical settings, deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolisms following long-distance travel shortly before or after surgery, and inadequate post-operative care following departure after the treatment.

For this reason, medical quality issue was one of the main interests of the research. Based on respondents' opinions, regulations and control regarding medical quality in Georgia is weak. There is a lack of standardization; system lacks incentives for providers and regulations to improve quality of care.

Another barrier named by facilitator companies is problems in communication, rapidness and flexibility of administrative personnel of clinics. In medical tourism, maximal desired response time on request from patients or facilitators is 48 hours (24 hour interval is preferable). In Georgia, facilitators encounter problems with this and because of this reason they prefer to collaborate with relatively small clinics. Moreover, those respondents of the research who represented facilitator companies recommended increasing qualification of management of hospitals in the direction of medical tourism. This is confirmed by the findings of the research, as well. Situation is highly polarized in this regard; there are managers of clinics who are highly aware about requirements and needs for medical tourism development

are very active to attract facilitators and medical tourists. While, there are managers of hospitals who are very passive in this direction, have low awareness and qualification.

Still another barrier for medical tourism development, in Georgia, is a lack of direct flights from potential "source countries". Stakeholders find it necessary to have direct flights with Uzbekistan, Chechnya etc. For instance, according to their opinion, having direct flight with Kazakhstan (from Octao it takes only 40 minutes to arrive) is one of the main reasons why patient flow from this country increased significantly, recently. Furthermore, in the literature experts of the field say that transporting capabilities and informational technologies are the backbone of medical tourism. Turkey is a good example of this, as Turkish Airlines having direct flights with more than 200 countries has greatly contributed to this country's success in medical tourism [15].

As results of interviews show, globally well approved channels for attracting medical tourists are not utilized adequately, in Georgia. To illustrate, the vast majority of assisted reproductive service clinics fully rely on medical tourism facilitators. They don't invest in promotion of their services, nor attempt to attract foreign patients directly. Half of interviewed clinics are quite passive with regard to attracting medical tourists and in attempts to collaborate with medical tourism facilitators. While one-third of respondents say that they actively promote their services on target markets and invest in various activities for this purpose. These respondents cite various ways of promotion they utilize. Some of them have country managers in target countries; visit these countries to demonstrate their medical potential and success. Other clinics organize info tours for interested potential patients or partner doctors abroad.

Another challenge that hospitals face is a language barrier, which rarely represents a problem in the case of doctors and specialists, as they mainly speak English and Russian languages. But in the case of lower skilled personnel - nurses, administrative personnel- which have direct and closer contact with patients knowledge of foreign languages (especially Russian) is problematic. According to the literature, cultural proximity including language, religion, customs and practices is one of the important factors in medical tourism. This industry seems to be influenced by familiarity and cultural similarity. In case of Georgia, cultural and religious issues, currently, represent a challenge for healthcare providers. To illustrate, the number of Muslim patients from Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other countries, willing to come to Georgia for hair transplantation and other plastic-cosmetic treatment is increasing significantly (since prices are much lower than in Turkey). Patients from these countries request that patient should be treated only by the same gender doctor or while hospitalized no opposite gender patient should be in the whole wing of hospital ward. At present, clinics in Georgia find it difficult to meet these requirements.

Conclusions. To summarize, gap analysis and differences between findings of narrative review and in-depth interviews show: in the literature international accreditation of medical facilities is mandatory and necessary to participate in medical tourism industry. While in Georgia, both, provider sector representatives and facilitators indicate that there is no demand for this from patients, currently. As it is known, JCI accreditation is quite costly and difficult to achieve, especially for the vast majority of Georgian clinics, where buildings and infrastructure are not meeting requirements of JCI. However, in order to cooperate with international funds and insurance companies clinics must have international accreditation. Moreover, with expansion of

medical tourism direction in Georgia and with penetration of new target markets this issue will become inevitable. Therefore, this need should be realized on time and relevant accreditation system should be selected for medical tourism provider hospitals.

Another finding of gap analysis is government's weak role and involvement. On one hand, Georgia's government declared interest and desire to develop medical tourism direction. On the other hand, there is no strategy, neither dedicated team, nor any plan. Although, as literature review shows there is a clear correlation among government's active involvement and strong role in medical tourism development and country's success in this direction. Accelerating the responsive capacity to keep pace with rapidly intensifying competition in global medical tourism seems imperative. Respectively, Georgia's government needs to develop strategy for medical tourism development and integrate various governmental bodies to work on this issue. Moreover, Country should be promoted on target markets as a medical tourism destination. Likewise, issues of direct flights, infrastructure, regulation and control of medical quality and other barriers and challenges should be included in the agenda.

However, Georgian healthcare market is quite unique in the world, as over 90% of healthcare facilities are private, for-profit clinics. In all other countries analyzed in the literature, from Government's favorable policies regarding medical tourism development benefited both, private, as well as, public hospitals. In case of Georgia, it is not easy to justify allocation of significant funds on medical tourism development under given circumstances (specificity of the healthcare market and the budget constraints). Therefore, Government's role should be significant in integrating its institutions around medical tourism development, being in a leader position, while, provider clinics should also be willing to allocate funds needed to develop this direction in the country and take part of responsibility on them.

Based on the research results, another recommendation concerns awareness and qualification of management of provider health facilities. One of the urgent needs seems to be increasing awareness about specificity of medical tourism, requirements of the industry etc. Based on the literature review and analysis of many successful cases, Government should initiate educational campaign and launch "recommended standards" for provider sector for the above-mentioned purpose.

For the further research, it is advisable to conduct quantitative research-customer satisfaction survey, to interview medical tourists in different specialty medical facilities. To assess the degree of satisfaction, evaluate barriers and problems encountered by foreign patients during treatment process or while staying in the country and which factors determine to choose Georgia as a destination country for treatment. Moreover, statistical analysis of medical tourists treated in Georgia should be performed. The purpose should be to determine is there upward or downward trend of medical tourists coming to Georgia, in previous years. Furthermore, to analyze which medical services are more demanded (by "source countries").

To conclude, Georgia has considerable potential for medical tourism development. Its healthcare sector is quite competitive in the region and has a perspective to become a hub of medical tourism in Transcaucasia region. However, there are number of significant barriers to overcome and challenges to respond to. Georgia, as a medical tourism destination country should be positioned on an international medical tourism market, to make it visible on global radar. In turn, this goal needs integration of governmental team and united efforts of various stakeholders of

the industry. Consequently, medical tourism development strategy should be developed and implemented with consideration of all the above-mentioned barriers, challenges and factors.

Given extremely intense competition in the medical tourism industry, globally, experts find appropriate for Georgia to identify its role and occupy respective niche on an international market.

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SUMMARY

PROSPECTS IN MEDICAL TOURISM IN GEORGIA-CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS IN HEALTHCARE SECTOR

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The global growth in the flow of patients and health professionals, as well as, capital funding and medical technology has given rise to broadly defined, rapidly growing, multi billion industry of medical tourism. In the last decade, medical tourism industry captured particular interest of the whole world. Experts of the field forecast great perspectives in medical tourism for Georgia. Georgia's healthcare sector is indeed competitive in number of medical services. The objective of conducted research was to identify barriers hindering medical tourism development and existing challenges in Georgia and to elaborate recommendations, accordingly. For this purpose, narrative review was performed utilizing various scientific article bases. In line with the research goals, 37 semi-structured, deep interviews were conducted with stakeholders of medical tourism industry in Georgia. Results were processed and analyzed using NVIVO software. According to the results of the research, to develop medical tourism direction, in Georgia, it is necessary to position and promote country as a medical tourism destination, globally. It is important to strengthen role of the government and increase its engagement in this direction. Another recommendation concerns quality of medical care and need for standardization of services and processes in medical facilities. Moreover, international accreditation and affiliation with international medical chains is suggested.

To conclude, Georgia has considerable potential for medical tourism development and a perspective to become a hub of medical tourism in Transcaucasia region. However, there are number of significant barriers to overcome and challenges to respond to.

Keywords: medical tourism, healthcare quality, barriers, challenges, international accreditation.

РЕЗЮМЕ

ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ МЕДИЦИНСКОГО ТУРИЗМА В ГРУЗИИ - ПРОБЛЕМЫ И БАРЬЕРЫ В СЕКТОРЕ ЗДРАВООХРАНЕНИЯ

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Глобальный рост потока пациентов и медицинских работников, а также капитального финансирования и медицинских технологий привел к появлению широко определенной, быстро растущей многомиллиардной индустрии медицинского туризма. Эксперты отрасли прогнозируют большие перспективы в медицинском туризме для Грузии.

Целью проведенного исследования явилось выявление

барьеров, препятствующих развитию медицинского туризма, и определение существующих проблем в Грузии.

Проведены аналитический обзор современной научной литературы по изучаемому вопросу и 37 полуструктурированных глубоких интервью с участниками индустрии. Результаты обработаны и проанализированы с использованием программного обеспечения NVIVO.

Согласно результатам исследования, для развития направления медицинского туризма в Грузии необходимо позиционировать и продвигать страну в направлении глобального медицинского туризма. Вынесены соответствующие рекомендации по качеству медицинской помощи, необходимости стандартизации услуг и процессов в медицинских учреждениях. Выявлена необходимость получения международной аккредитации медицинскими учреждениями Грузии и стандартизации медицинских сервисов.

Авторами дается заключение о наличии значительного потенциала для развития медицинского туризма в Грузии, существующих барьерах и путях их преодоления.

რეზიუმე

სამედიცინო ტურიზმის პერსპექტივები საქართველოში: პრობლემები და ბარიერები ჯანდაცვის სექტორში

ნ.მიკავა, ო.ვასაძე

საქართველოს უნივერსიტეტი, ჯანმრთელობის მეცნიერებების სკოლა, თბილისი, საქართველო

გლობალიზაციის ეფექტმა, საერთაშორისო ვაჭრობის ხელშეწყობამ, ჯანდაცვის პროფესიონალებისა და პაციენტების საერთაშორისო საზღვრებს შორის თავისუფალმა მიმოსვლამ განაპირობა სამედიცინო ტურიზმის მძლავრი და სწრაფი ტემპით მზარდი ინდუსტრიის ჩამოყალიბება. დარგის ექსპერტები აღნიშნავენ, რომ საქართველოს სამედიცინო ტურიზმის მიმართულებით გააჩნია დიდი პოტენციალი.

კვლევის მიზანს წარმოადგენდა საქართველოში სამედიცინო ტურიზმის განვითარებისთვის ხელისშემშლელი ბარიერებისა და არსებული გამოწვევების იდენტიფიცირება. ჩატარებულია ნარატიული მიმოხილვა და 37 ჩალრმაკებული, ნახევრად-სტრუქტურირებული ინტერვიუ საქართველოში სამედიცინო ტურიზმის ინდუსტრიაში მონაწილე პირებთან. მიღებული შედეგები დამუშავდა NVIVO-ს გამოყენებით.

კვლევის შედეგების მიხედვით, ქვეყანაში სამედიცინო ტურიზმის განვითარებისთვის აუცილებელია ქვეყნის, როგორც სამედიცინო ტურიზმის დესტინაციის პოზიციონირება გლობალურად და პოპულარიზება. მნიშვნელოვანია მთავრობის ჩართულობის როლის გაძლიერება. გამოიკვეთა საჭიროება სამედიცინო დაწესებულებების მიერ საერთაშორისო აკრედიტაციის მოპოვების და სამედიცინო სერვისების სტანდარტიზირების საჭიროება.

დასკვნის სახით შესაძლოა ითქვას, რომ საქართველოს გააჩნია მნიშვნელოვანი პოტენციალი სამედიცინო ტურიზმის განვითარებისთვის და პერსპექტივა გახდეს სამედიცინო ტურიზმის „ჰაბი“ კავკასიაში.