



Health Tourism in Iran: A Path towards Sustainable Development

Seyyed Meysam MOUSAVI¹, Mehdi HAGHI², *Mahdi GHARASI MANSHADI³

1. *Dept. of Health Management and Economics, School of Public Health, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran*

2. *Dept. of Health Education, Shabid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, Yazd, Iran*

3. *Health Management and Economics Research Center, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran*

***Corresponding Author:** Email: mgharasi@razi.tums.ac.ir

(Received 11 Oct 2015; accepted 05 Dec 2015)

Dear Editor in Chief

In many countries, tourism is a major force for economic growth. Today, the role of tourism in socio-economic development of countries developed to a higher degree which economists have called it invisible exports. Experts predict that the tourism becomes the most profitable industry in the world in 2020 (1). Among the different areas of tourism, health tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry in the world (2). Health tourism means traveling to other countries to receive some forms of health care services, which includes a wide range of treatment practices (3). Some of the main reasons of people to travel in other countries include health aspects, changing consumer values, increased stress and workload, aging population, high health care and treatment costs in developed countries, lack of insurance coverage, lack of facilities in the country of origin, possibility of treatment along with the enjoyment of the holidays (2). It is estimated that each health tourist will generate exchange rate three times a normal tourist (1). What is clear is that health tourism in the world and also in developing countries has boomed. Globalization and trade liberalization in the area of health care has paved the way for the fast growing of this type of tourism (1, 4).

Single product economy of Iran which is only based on oil-based products has led to the many

problems for the country and great fluctuations have always adversely impacted Iran's economy. Health tourism industry is one of the factors that have been mentioned in national health map, so that 5% of the total resources of the health system will be supplied by the incomes from treatment (medical) tourism by the end of the fifth development plan (5). At present, the main reasons for patients to travel to Iran is the high quality of health services, low costs of medication and treatment compared to other countries in the region, access to health services and modern and advanced equipment, the presence of professionals and skilled experts in the field of health in Iran, shared culture and language and the shortage or lack of equipment and experts in the most countries of the origin (3). If health tourism is considered as a priority, Iran could potentially prevent from transfer of the currency and manpower to other countries (1, 6, 7). It is worth noting that the increase in revenue from service overseas can develop health infrastructure, especially for vulnerable groups of society (8). Iran is faced by some challenges in the areas including basic and medical infrastructures, state effective supports, having a formulated program of health tourism development, inter-sectoral coordination and participation at the macro- and operational level, having accred-

ited health service providers, and promotion and integrated marketing (9).

Therefore, policymakers should design a systematic and comprehensive program, and by designing and operation of healthcare city in the provinces with strategic location (e.g. West Azerbaijan and Khorasan Razavi, etc.) ensure the development of the health tourism industry. In addition, special attention have to be paid to improve the quality of services to achieve positive results from treatment practices, and in case of the neglect of this issue, adverse consequences will be ensued. It is worth noting that the development of this industry in Iran could lead to health problems such as brokerage, which requires serious attention. In the end, by using mass media, the culture must be nurtured for the public in order to attract tourism in different countries. In addition, propaganda and advertisements in international media have to improve to attract tourism in many countries.

Acknowledgements

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

References

1. Morovati Sharifabadi A, Asadian Ardakani F (2014). A Model for Health Tourism Development Using Fuzzy TOPSIS and Interpretive Structural Modeling in Yazd Province. *J Health Adm*, 17(55):73-88.
2. Seyyadjavadyn SR, Shafaei M, Shafaghat Lonbar H, Najafi B (2013). Investigating the Development of the Private Sector in Health Tourism (Based On Lewin's Model). *J Health Account*, 2(4):15-32.
3. Mostafavi H, Shamsi Goushki E, Abbasi M (2012). Ethics in Health Tourism. *Iran J Biotech*, 2(4):161-80.
4. Khodayari R, Tourani S, Qaderi A, Salehi M, Jafari H (2011). Capabilities assessing of teaching hospitals in Iran University of medical sciences in attracting medical tourists according to JCI patient-oriented standards. *Hosp*, 9(3):51-6.
5. Jabbari A, Ferdosi M, Keyvanara M, Agharahimi Z (2013). Analysis of medical tourism industry stakeholders: Providing effective strategies in Isfahan, Iran. *Health Info Manage*, 9(6):1-9.
6. Sharifabadi A, Ardakani F (2014). A model for health tourism development using fuzzy TOPSIS and interpretive structural modeling in Yazd province. *J Health Admin*, 17(55):73-88.
7. Izadi M, Ayoobian A, Nasiri T, Joneidi N, Fazel M, Hosseinpourfard M (2012). Situation of health tourism in Iran; opportunity or threat. *Mil Med J*, 14(2):69-75.
8. Shaarbafchi-zadeh N, Azami S, Bastani P (2012). Opportunities and challenges against cross border supply of health services in Iranian health sector: a qualitative approach. *Razj J Med Sci*, 19(100):1-11.
9. Delgoshai B, Jabbari A, Farzin MR, Sherbafchi-zadeh N, Tabibi SJ (2012). Current situation of medical tourism: a case study of Iran. *Payesh J*, 11(2):157-65.