

Medical Tourism Competencies and Policies Along With Health Competencies and Awareness of The Institutions and Employees

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to determine the competence and policies of Turkey with the competence and awareness of health institutions and health workers in the field of medical tourism. This study was carried out in March-June 2015 at five different hospitals operating in the center of Gümüşhane and Trabzon provinces with the relevant 120 health administrators and employees. The "Medical Tourism (MT) Competencies, Policies and Awareness Scale" developed by Bostan was used to collect data. The reliability of the scale was tested by factor analysis in terms of structural validity. The reliability of scale was calculated as Cronbach's Alpha ,89.As to the participants 56% of them were lower level, 38% were middle level and 13% were top level managers examined the executive statutes of the institution. They stated that they are unstable about the adequacy of the health services offered within the scope of health tourism, do not have enough knowledge about medical tourism, health workers have difficulties in communicating with foreign patients and they are not trained in medical tourism. Especially the staff whoknow foreign languages and have health tourism education should be employed and the current staff should give importance to the language education and thus the competence in the sector would be basically strengthened. It is thought that the applicable plans and strategies will help to increase the existing medical tourism activities and to improve the competitiveness of the countries in medical tourism industry.

Keywords: Medical Tourism, Health Managers, Competencies, Policies

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I. Introduction

One of the significant products of globalization is the rises of economic integration and interdependence of nation's state and region. Concurrent events of free exchange of products and people and the rise of cross-border movement are facilitated by this strong international connection between countries which has successfully increased the growing of international market rapidly. This includes the market of healthcare products, services as well as consumers and one of the growing healthcare market. (Mutalib, Ming, Yee, Wong and Soh, 2016).

Despite the notable growth and size of the medical tourism industry, there is a lack of empirical insights into the construct of countries as medical tourism destinations. This lack has been ascribed to the lack of a domain-specific and statistically sound measurement system (Riefler, Diamantopoulos, & Siguaw, 2012).

In this study, it was aimed to reveal the current situation in Turkey in the field of medical tourism which has an increasingly importance effects on tourism diversity, to determine what needs to be done in order to increase the share of Turkey in tourism industry and to reveal how the qualifications of health institutions and employees in the industry should be.

II. Literature

While a few years ago only a small number of hospitals and countries promoting themselves as medical tourism destinations, "today there are hundreds of hospitals and clinics and over thirty different countries promoting it" (Saadatnia & Mehregan, 2014, p. 156). Despite the increasing number of countries providing medical tourism, we "currently know very little about many of the key features of medical tourism" and the actual size of the industry. (Fetscherin ve Stephano, 2016)

Fierce competition and rising operational costs drive healthcare providers to focus on designing appropriate strategies to achieve competitive advantage. Similar to other service sectors, quality service provided by medical operators becomes a key advantage in business sustainability and growth (Prajitmutita, Perenyi ve Prencitice, 2016).

Most of the conducted studies are on demand side (medical tourists) while small part of on supply side (medical staff). When scholars search in databases with the keywords “medical staff”, “medical personnel”, “medical employee” they commonly would see as a word in a study not a title.

In Turkey, planning studies about the efficient and high quality of health care services have become one of the most debated topics in recent years. Hospitals are the largest sub-systems of the health service production units. Hence, hospitals should be managed according to the contemporary management approach, since the majority of service production is undertaken (Kılınç and Tutar, 2007).

III. Method

Purpose

The opinion of the health professionals who take part in the health institutions and organizations that the medical tourism is a developing area has been the starting point of this research. The aim of this study is to determine the competence and politics of Turkey's medical tourism and the competence and awareness of health institutions and health workers.

Sample

This study was carried out in March-June 2015 with the participation of 5 different hospitals operating in the center of Gumushane and Trabzon provinces with 120 administrators (Administrative, Administrative and Financial Manager, Chief Physician, Head Nurse, Physician, Nurse, Patient Admission, Patient Rights, Quality Coordinator etc.) Health manager and employee.

Scale, Validity and Reliability Analysis

The "Medical Tourism Competencies, Policies and Awareness Scale" developed by Sedat Bostan for the first time was used to collect data. The scale consists of demographic and occupational questions and scale quintile likert expressions. Participation level of expressions; Strongly Disagree, Not Satisfied, Undecided, Agree, Strongly Agree. In addition, 3 open-ended questions were given to the participants in order to get suggestions about medical tourism in Turkey.

The validity of the scale was tested by factor analysis in terms of structural validity. A total of 25 expressions were finalized as 19 expressions as a result of exploratory factor analysis. According to the results of the factor analysis, BMD value is 0,771 and Bartlett's test result; since the Ki-Square is approximately 1955,231 and Df is 171 and ($p < 0,00$), it is determined that the scale is appropriate for the factor analysis according to the analysis result. Expression of the scale is gathered under two factors, accounting for 56% of the total variance. Expressions and loadings are given in Table 1.

Table 1.Factor Loadings and Factors of Expressions

Expressions	Factors / Factor Loadings	Turkey's Medical Tourism Compt/Policies	Health Inst and Employees' Compt/Awarness
S19. The physical environment (room, hall, wc, etc.) of the hospital within the scope of medical tourism should be aesthetic and reflect our culture.		,888	
S4. Turkey is a developing country in the field of health tourism.		,859	
S18. The hospitals in Turkey have modern devices and equipments that can serve medical tourists.		,849	
S11. Problems arising from the legislation in the field of health tourism are in the sector.		,802	
S8. International accreditation of hospitals increase preferability.		,797	
S12. Turkey needs new legal regulations in order to increase its share in the medical tourism market.		,705	
S15. Foreign patients in Turkey are mainly treated in private health institutions.		,690	
S10. I think that there is not enough investment in health tourism.		,657	
S13. Considering the health services provided by Turkey, we can evaluate Asian countries as competitors.		,606	
S14. Turkey has sufficient infrastructure in terms of medical tourism.		,601	
S3. I have general knowledge about health tourism.		,585	
S2. I do not have any difficulty in communicating with patients who come to the hospital for treatment or who are coming from foreign countries.			,844
S1. I have been trained by your institution on services that will be offered to foreign patients.			,789
S17. There are travel agencies specializing in medical tourism in Turkey.			,782
S9. Health institutions should focus on promotion activities for foreign patients.			,739
S16. Enough cooperation has been provided between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in terms of development of the			,720

sector.		
S6. The prices of the major health services offered in foreign countries in Turkey are economically advantageous compared to the prices offered in other countries.		,678
S7. For health tourism, tour companies should organize for patients to come to my country.		,576
S5. Health services offered within the scope of health tourism in Turkey are sufficient level.		,348

The first of these factors is the expression of the potential of medical tourism, which Turkey possesses, to evaluate its policies in terms of employees. The second factor is the question of determining the medical tourism competencies and awareness of health institutions and their employees. The reliability of the scale was calculated as Cronbach's Alpha, .89. Both the validity and the reliability of the scale indicate that the scale has measurement capability and application reliability in the area of scale. Finally, in the data analysis, Student's T-test was used when there was a statistically significant difference between the independent groups and the number of independent groups. When the number of independent groups was more than two, ANOVA test was applied.

IV. Findings

The demographic characteristics of the participants in the sampling group are shown by frequency and percentage descriptive statistics, and then the awareness and awareness of medical tourism in terms of health administrators is examined.

Table 2. Demographic and Social Characteristics of Participants

Variables	Frequency	%	Variables	Frequency	%		
Age	21-30	75	62,5	Status of Admins	Low	67	55,8
	31-40	34	28,3		Middle	38	31,7
	41-50	6	5,0		Top	15	12,5
	51-60	5	4,2				
Sex	Female	71	59,2	Number of Bed	0-200	37	30,8
	Male	49	40,8		201-400	39	32,5
			401-600		-	-	
			601-800		14	11,7	
			801-1000		30	25,0	
Education	H.School	33	27,5	Tourism Office	Avail	108	90,0
	V.School	21	17,5		N/A	12	10,0
	Ugraduate	53	44,2				
	Graduate	13	10,8				
Working Period	0-10	79	65,8	Total		120	100
	11-20	32	26,7				
	21-30	9	7,5				

Of the participants in the sample group, 63% were aged 21-30; 59% of women; 44% have a bachelor's degree; It is understood that 66% of them work in the institution in the period of 0-10 years. When the participants in the sample group examined the managerial statutes of the institution, it was seen that 56% of them were lower level, 38% were middle level and 13% were top level managers. 10% of the participants declared medical tourism office in their hospital (only one hospital).

Hospital administrators' views on Turkey's medical tourism competencies and policies are given below.

Table 3. Opinions of Health Managers about Turkey's Medical Tourism Sector Competencies and Policies

Expressions	Analysis	AM	SD
S3. I have general knowledge about health tourism.		2,50	1,22
S4. Turkey is a developing country in the field of health tourism.		3,01	1,34
S8. International accreditation of hospitals increase preferability.		3,45	1,33
S10. I think that there is not enough investment in health tourism.		3,20	1,11
S11. Problems arising from the legislation in the field of health tourism are in the sector.		3,29	1,25
S12. Turkey needs new legal regulations in order to increase its share in the medical tourism market.		2,95	1,24
S13. Considering the health services provided by Turkey, we can evaluate Asian		3,22	1,20

countries as competitors.		
S14. Turkey has sufficient infrastructure in terms of medical tourism.	2,64	1,07
S15. Foreign patients in Turkey are mainly treated in private health institutions.	3,25	1,24
S18. The hospitals in Turkey have modern devices and equipments that can serve medical tourists.	2,95	1,33
S19. The physical environment (room, hall, wc, etc.) of the hospital within the scope of medical tourism should be aesthetic and reflect our culture.	3,73	1,41
General Average	3,10	1,24

When Table 3 is examined, "The physical environment (room, corridor, wc, etc.) of the hospitals providing services within the scope of medical tourism has been the highest expression with averages of (3.73) points which should be aesthetic and reflect our culture". The lowest score level from the questions in the first factor was "Turkey has sufficient infrastructure in terms of medical tourism" (2,64) with the statement "I have general knowledge about health tourism" (2,50). The factor was scored at the general average (3, 10) level.

Health administrators stated that the infrastructure of Turkey is inadequate in terms of medical tourism and that it is important for hospitals to take part in the medical tourism sector to be accredited by designing comfortably and reflecting our culture. At the same time, they point out that the prices of health care services are enough to provide financial advantage to the medical tourists, but they also suggest that the hospitals should make the medical tourism promotion activities more effective.

Table 4. Opinions of Health Admins about Health Institutions and Employees' MT Competencies and Awareness

Expressions	Analysis	AM	SD
S1. I have been trained by your institution on services that will be offered to foreign patients.		1,85	1,19
S2. I do not have any difficulty in communicating with patients who come to the hospital for treatment or who are coming from foreign countries.		2,59	1,27
S5. Health services offered within the scope of health tourism in Turkey are sufficient level.		2,67	1,01
S6. The prices of the major health services offered in foreign countries in Turkey are economically advantageous compared to the prices offered in other countries.		3,30	1,26
S7. For health tourism, tour companies should organize for patients to come to my country.		3,19	1,32
S9. Health institutions should focus on promotion activities for foreign patients.		3,65	1,26
S16. Enough cooperation has been provided between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in terms of development of the sector.		2,87	1,30
S17. There are travel agencies specializing in medical tourism in Turkey.		3,00	0,93
General Average		2,89	1,19

When Table 4 examined; The expression with the lowest average score of the expressions of the healthcare institutions and their health workers' competencies and awareness within the scope of the Medical Tourism has been "I have been trained by the Institution about the service to be offered to foreign patients" (1.85). It is calculated as the general average (2.89).

They stated that they are unstable about the adequacy of the health services offered within the scope of health tourism, that they do not have enough knowledge about medical tourism, that health workers will have difficulty in communicating with foreign patients and that they are not trained in medical tourism.

The results of the T test and ANOVO analyzes for measuring the difference between the independent variables are as follows.

Table 5. Significant Differences Between Independent Variables

Factors	Sex	N	Mean	SD	t	P
Turkey's competencies and policies in the	Female	71	2,89	0,99		

medical tourism sector	Male	49	3,42	0,96	-3,211	0,02
Healthcare institutions and their employees' competencies and awareness in medical tourism	Female	71	2,6	0,96	-4,986	0,00
	Male	49	3,31	0,84		
Factors	Educati on	N	Mean	SD	F	P
Turkey's competencies and policies in the medical tourism sector	High School	33	3,17	0,7	4,680	0,04
	Voc. School	53	3,42	0,49		
	U.graduate	21	2,8	1,17		
	Graduate	13	3,68	0,35		
Healthcare institutions and their employees' competencies and awareness in medical tourism	High School	33	2,6	0,56	2,890	0,039
	Voc. School	53	2,77	0,32		
	U. graduate	21	3,12	1,09		
	Graduate	13	2,83	0,53		
Factor	Status of Admin	N	Mean	SD	F	P
Turkey's competencies and policies in the medical tourism sector	Low	67	2,92	0,97	3,225	0,043
	Middle	38	3,30	0,79		
	Top	15	3,46	0,84		

When Table 5 is examined, it is understood that male managers have more positive views on both factors than women. One can argue that male managers are more knowledgeable about medical tourism. In terms of the education of the administrators; It has been found that those who have undergraduate training in medical tourism competencies and politics of Turkey, health institutions and those with undergraduate training in the competence and awareness of employees have more positive views. In the case of executive statutes, senior executives were found to have a more positive approach to the issue.

V. Discussion

This study suggests that healthcare employees evaluate the competencies and policies through tangible aspects such as; (i)the appearance of physical facilities and medical equipment; (ii)the expertise of staff and their performance on carrying out their task; and (iii)the effective marketing of health tourism and other healthcare services for health tourists. These findings have practical implications for healthcare providers. Apart from the tangible aspects, this research shows that expertise and marketing are both core technical aspects of health care services that hospital providers should attend to. Recruiting skilled (language, training exc.) managers and health workers with substantial experience is needed for healthcare providers to improve competitiveness. This inturn will also contribute to the capability of the hospitals to achieve successful outcomes, further enhancing medical tourists' perception of service quality. Besides building credibility through raising technical capabilities, advocating favorable outcomes also affect healthcare employees' decisions (Prajitmutita, Perenyi ve Prencitice, 2016).

It was detected that most of the hospital managers could provide necessary precautions for the safety of the patients and could give guarantee for the provisions. However, they should give more information about the legal issues. Otherwise they could confront legal, ethical, and judicial problems. It is important to take measures for possible problems by the hospital managers, other managing staff, health workers and contact agencies (Aksoy, Ertan ve Ulutin, 2017).

In the Seyfullahoğulları's (2014) research which the data obtained from 150 hospital personnel were used in his research that was done in a sample hospital. While service quality was the most important factor, it was followed by tourist attractions. The cheapness and the ease of transportation were found to be the lowest factor.

Abd Manaf and fellows' (2015) research on service quality, the findings indicate that of the three dimensions of service quality, the respondents were most satisfied with medical staff quality which has the highest mean score of 3.80. This was followed by supporting services quality at 3.68 and administrative services quality at 3.63.

Yu and Ko (2007) study revealed that in terms of medical services, the patients considered the skills of medical staff the most important factor, which was followed by the reliability of medical centers, and medical facilities and equipment.

It is in the quality of the physical environment that Turkey has the potential to provide services within the medical tourism policies through the obtained data. It has become clear that businesses need to take into account the physical qualities that provide the most appropriate physical conditions and reflect Turkish culture. It can be stated that policies and investments should be organized in this direction.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

Within the scope of the research, it is possible to have some inferences as a result of the survey applied to the health administrators in order to measure their medical tourism competencies and awareness.

It is important that the medical tourism infrastructure of Turkey is inadequate, also the hospitals which will take part in the medical tourism sector should be designed and accredited to have comfortable facilities and environments and to reflect culture of Turkey. It has been stated that the prices of health care services are sufficient to provide financial advantage to the medical tourists, however the hospitals should make the medical tourism promotion activities more effective.

It is understood that the institutions do not provide in-service trainings for the health services that will be offered to foreign patients within the scope of medical tourism and that there are very few or no medical tourism units in the health institutions where the participants in the sample of this research.

When the qualifications and awareness of hospital and health workers are examined; They stated that they are unstable about the adequacy of the health services provided within the scope of health tourism, that they do not have enough knowledge about medical tourism, that health workers will have difficulty in communicating with foreign patients, and that they do not receive training in medical tourism.

Suggestions about the subject can be listed as follows. In order to evaluate the potential of Turkey in health tourism, firstly the quality of the enterprises should be increased and the managers and employees should have medical tourism consciousness. For this purpose, it is necessary to think about the necessity of training medical staff to establish a medical tourism culture by establishing relevant units. With training, quality awareness would be created and employees would be involved in the quality process.

In the hospitals offering medical tourism services, education studies should be done by specialists regarding the subject and they should open positions to experts in the field of medical tourism. Particularly, foreign language-speaking and health tourism educated personnel should be employed. Current personnel should be given importance to language education and the competence in the sector should be strengthened. The main actors of health tourism are hospitals, but it is necessary to cooperate with different actors such as marketing, provision of accommodation services and insurance. Hence, it would be beneficial to strengthen communication between actors on a common ground of publicity.

Considering such factors as the quality of the health services offered in Turkey, the more appropriate costs compared to other countries, the geographical and climatic suitability, the availability of vacations, the short waiting periods according to competing countries, the specialized hospitals and adequate technological equipment possibilities. It is thought that the applicable plans and strategies will help Turkey to increase the existing medical tourism activities and help the countries in the medical tourism to come before competitors.

Medical tourism, a part of international tourism that contributes to the country's economy in various ways, should be promoted to a more advanced level in Turkey and the marketing strategies of the competitors should be viewed in order for the hospitals who want to focus on health tourism to take a share from the international tourism market and develop marketing strategies that will differentiate Turkey from its competitors.

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