

Chapter 16

Empirical Analysis on the Medical Tourism Policy in Taiwan

I-Chun Liu

Yuan Ze University, Taiwan

Chii-Ching Chen

Kainan University, Taiwan

ABSTRACT

“Medical Tourism” is a growing industry, attracting more and more attention. Taiwan’s government, hopeful that this new industry could generate considerable revenue, has declared its ambition to become the premier choice for cross-country medical care for international visitors. The policy network approach emphasizes the interaction between policy actors. This chapter examines Taiwan’s medical tourism development from the model of public policy implementation. We present findings from twelve semi-structured interviews with stakeholders across medical service providers, as well as government officers, and civil society sectors. We found that medical tourism in Taiwan is a growing service, with both public and private sector involvement. However, it is still lagging behind regional competitors such as Singapore, Thailand, and India. Thus, active efforts should be made to encourage the coordination between the medical care sector, tourism industry, and relevant authorities.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, people would travel from less developed countries to major medical centers in highly developed countries for medical treatment that was unavailable in their own communities. The recent trend is for people to travel from developed countries to third world countries for medical treatments because of cost consideration, though the traditional pattern still continues. The recent trend is for people to travel from developed countries to third world countries for medical treatments because of cost consideration, though the traditional pattern still continues. Another reason for travel for medical treatment is because some treatments may not be legal in the home country, such as some fertility procedures. Medical Tour-

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ism is where people who live in one country travel to another country to receive medical, dental and surgical care while at the same time receiving equal to or greater care than they would have in their own country. The primary purpose of this chapter is to analyze medical tourism policy implementation in Taiwan from policy network approach.

BACKGROUND

Rise in health care costs in developed countries coupled with the availability of high quality medical services at lower prices in developing nations has primarily surged the expansion of the medical tourism industry. Patients are travelling abroad not only for cosmetic surgeries with a quick recovery, but also for sophisticated cardiovascular surgeries. This international trend has captured the attention of policy makers, relevant enterprises, and academics in both destination and sending countries. By encouraging its presence in the medical tourism market, a country can stimulate its economic growth and create employment opportunities. Consequently, the medical tourism market is rapidly expanding and is anticipated to have a significant growth in the near future (Transparency Market Research, 2013).

The practice of enjoying the local scenery or humanistic characteristics of tourism and simultaneously receiving dental, surgical, and other treatments and health care services has already become a global trend. "Medical Tourism" brings considerable business opportunities worth several hundred billion U.S. dollars, and is becoming a mushrooming industry attracting mass media (Turner, 2007). According to a new market report published by Transparency Market Research "Medical Tourism Market - Global Industry Analysis, Size, Share, Growth, Trends and Forecast, 2013 - 2019," the global medical tourism market was valued at 10.5 billion U.S. dollars in 2012 and is estimated to reach a market worth 32.5 billion U.S. dollars in 2019 at a CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate), of 17.9% from 2013 to 2019 (Transparency Market Research, 2013).

Given the popularity of medical tourism, it has received much scholarly attention. Some scholars from fields of medicine and law have examined specific issues like health effects, fiduciary requirements, and applicability of existing laws for international medical services (Balaban & Marano, 2010; Arellano, 2007). More analysis is needed of the rationale for travel, the behavior of medical tourists, the economic and social impact of medical tourism, the role of intermediaries, the place of medical tourism within tourism (linkages with hotels, airlines, travel agents), ethical concerns and global health restructuring (Connell, 2013). Previous research discusses the development of the new cross-sector service requires strategic planning and coordination among key stakeholders such as hospitals, medical travel agencies, hotels, and public sectors. Governments are noticeably playing a strong marketing and promotional role in the emerging medical tourism industry. This is a clear trend in Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, the main regional hubs for medical tourism, where medical tourist visas are available and government agencies have been established with the mandate to increase medical tourist inflows (Chanda & Tangcharoensathien, 2009). Medical tourism industry is an amalgamation of transportation, accommodation, entertainment, and recreation and includes intermediaries (travel agents & tour operators) (Haque & Rahman, 2012). Since this is the industry of the industries, for its proper coordination and smooth running, the interaction between those actors has become a vital part of this industry. However, relatively few studies have examined these public and private sectors' interactive relationships, and further research must be conducted to provide an adequate evidence base for any in-

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