



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Tourism

COMPETENCY REQUIRED BY MEDICAL TRAVEL FACILITATORS IN MEDICAL TOURISM INDUSTRY

KEY WORDS: Medical tourism facilitator, Medical travel, Competency analysis, Medical professionals

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ABSTRACT

The field of medical tourism is rapidly expanding, and medical travel facilitators play an increasingly significant role. These facilitators are in charge of supporting individuals seeking medical treatment overseas by managing all elements of their trip, including booking appointments with healthcare specialists and arranging travel logistics. To guarantee that medical travel facilitators have the essential competencies to perform their jobs effectively, a complete literature evaluation is being done to create a competency framework for this position. Furthermore, the job of hotel general manager is critical in the hospitality and tourist industries, and a comprehensive and relevant leadership competency framework is required to ensure that persons in this role have the necessary skills for success. While competency models have been effective for management development in this business, they frequently focus too narrowly on leadership behaviours that improve staff service performance and customer satisfaction. To solve this challenge, a "service-leadership" competency model is being created expressly for the hotel and tourist sectors.

INTRODUCTION

The term "medical tourism" describes the practice of visitors going abroad for medical treatment while taking part in other travel-related activities. A factor behind the expansion of the medical tourism industry is the increasing number of affluent patients who go outside of their home country to receive both medical and tourism services. The category of tourism known as medical tourism places a strong emphasis on top-notch medical care. Patients traveling for medical purposes can select the kind of care they require, as well as the facility, time, and location. The estimated value of medical tourism in 2020 was USD 54.4 billion, medical tourism is expected to rise significantly despite the interruption brought on by the coronavirus pandemic, accumulating to a 200 billion US dollar value by 2027. Due to its many alleged advantages, medical travel is becoming more and more popular. These perks include recreational (destination reach), health (access to medical care), financial (affordable price), and opportunistic (privacy, availability of advanced technology). The development of the Internet and the emergence of medical tourism intermediaries—that is, middlemen between hospital networks and foreign patients—have both contributed to the growth of medical tourism. The internet has enabled globalization and has created opportunities for the global marketing of services, including health care. Medical tourism facilitators (MTFs) are increasingly using social media and the Internet to market health services in order to reach a larger audience. Facilitators with specific understanding of travel and healthcare services open up a plethora of opportunities for medical tourists. These medical tourism facilitators offer centralized data and suggestions for acceptable foreign medical facilities, they also serve as a point of contact for travelers and hospitals, facilitating arrangements that meet everyone's needs. Although they differ in size and scope, the majority offer general services such as itinerary development, overseas medical care, and doctor referrals. Therefore, it is important to have an understanding of what medical tourism facilitators do to make sure that the industry grows sustainably. MTFs that can be skilled in some expertise may help businesses adjust to change; hence enhance their relationships with customers and improve competitiveness.

For a medical tourism experience to be successful and safe, medical travel facilitator's skills are crucial. The absence of well trained facilitators exposes patients to problems like lack of proper communication with health professionals, wrong or unavailable information on treatment options as well as difficulty navigating across foreign health systems. An overview of the body of research on the competency needed by medical travel facilitators in the medical tourism industry will be given by this study. This research will provide the

precise abilities and competencies needed for medical travel facilitators to properly perform their tasks and responsibilities.

The importance of investigating the competencies required for Medical Travel Facilitators (MTFs) to navigate the intricate details of the medical tourism landscape properly

1- Changing Dynamics of the Industry:- The medical tourism sector is changing quickly due to rising patient demands, new regulations, and technology breakthroughs. Determining the fundamental skills needed by MTFs is essential to ensuring their adaptability and success in this changing environment.

2- Reducing Distances and Diminishing Weaknesses: MTFs are essential in reducing the vulnerabilities that medical tourists confront and in bridging the gaps between patients and healthcare professionals. By having a deeper understanding of the required competencies, MTFs can assist patients more effectively throughout their healthcare journey.

3- Enhancing the Experience and Results for Patients: The quality of care provided to medical tourists is directly impacted by the competencies of MTFs, and this can ultimately affect their entire experience and health outcomes. Examining these skills can result in better patient care and satisfaction.

4- Industrial Development and Professionalization: By establishing best practices and standards for efficient facilitation, the definition of the fundamental competencies for MTFs can help the medical tourism sector become more professional. Therefore, this might potentially foster the overall development and expansion of the medical travel sector.

5- Learning for Development and Training: This helps in enhancing their competency levels and makes them less dependable and/or providing unskilled facilitation services.

Literature Review

Medical Tourism:

The term "medical tourism," also referred to as "medical travel," is a growing sector of the travel industry in which patients go abroad for treatment, it's a specialized industry which has grown in recent years due to its significant economic benefits. Travel for medical purposes practices rely on effectively educating potential clients about available procedures and treatments, amenities, travel options, tourist destinations, and travel schedules. These long journeys were

made by medical tourists from Europe to Asia to receive procedures such as cosmetic surgery, in-vitro fertilization (IVF), dental care, and elective surgeries. Among the active regions and countries offering medical tourism services are Asia (Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore); Eastern Europe (Hungary and Poland); Mediterranean (Malta and Cyprus); Africa (specifically South Africa); South and Central America (Costa Rica, Mexico, Brazil, and Cuba); and the Middle East (particularly Dubai and Jordan). Medical tourism has to balance the promises of new technology with cost-effectiveness because most patients seeking high-skill, low-cost care abroad do so. Medical tourism facilitators are crucial in helping medical travelers create a personalized experience that meets their goals, as they often face challenges assessing the quality and value of long-distance care.

The Evolution Of Facilitators-

As the number of medical tourists rises and opens up new markets, MTFs—whether operating independently or in tandem with an organization—become increasingly important to the medical tourism industry. Several terms, including "medical broker," "medical tourism companies," "medical agent," and "medical intermediaries," are used to refer to MTF. They operate as a point of contact for foreign patients and medical professionals in the host countries, answering crucial questions about medical conditions, travel, and housing requirements, they carry out these responsibilities by supplying a variety of services, such as information, consulting, booking management, fostering networking connections, and providing all-encompassing industry support. Different kinds of MTFs (Medical Tourism facilitator) have been categorized based on their working relationships from a career viewpoint. MTFs are divided into three categories by Dalstrom: full service facilitator, referral services, individual service facilitator.

(A) Full service facilitator - FSFs, or full-service facilitators, provide the most extensive services. Everything from travel visas to medical facilities, doctors, post-operative care, and translators is available, depending on the facilitator. Furthermore, as per Turner's (2010) findings, FSFs often combine these services into separate packages (like a vacation package), which simplifies the planning process for prospective patients. The majority of FSFs function on the assumption that patients find it difficult, It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to assess physicians and medical institutions, and medical travel is inherently difficult because of logistical and cultural barriers.

(B) Referral service facilitators- Similar to an FSF, an RSF's objective is to match a patient with a healthcare practitioner rather than take care of all the administrative details. RSFs usually provide more restricted services including making appointments, making certain transportation arrangements, and giving information on a small number of medical providers. RSFs typically function within a single nation, in contrast to FSFs.

(C) Individual service facilitators- Individual service facilitators, also referred to as stand-alone specialists, these are foreign medical providers who market their services directly to patients. They prioritize connecting people during medical encounters by giving information, translating, and guiding them to appropriate doctors, rather than eradicating cultural differences.

Medical Travel Facilitator Services

Multidimensional Responsibilities of MTFs - The literature underscores the diverse range of services offered by MTFs such as consultancy, information dissemination, reservation and booking, hospitality delivery, building networks and industry development support. Importantly, MTFs are important in bridging the gap between patients' and

healthcare providers hence reducing vulnerability conferred by medical tourism.

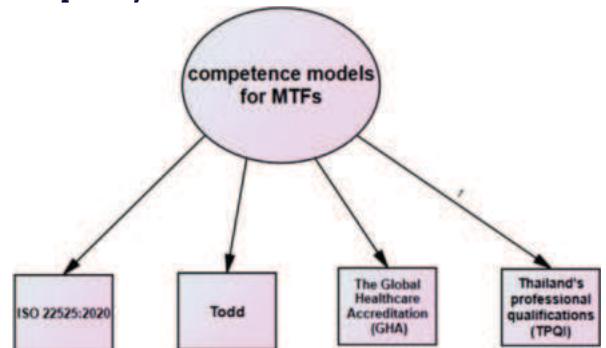
Consultancy and information distribution: MTFs provide consultancy for medical tourists to help them make informed decisions or answer questions. They are also responsible for disseminating information on health care options available, cost of treatment, travel arrangements among other factors that affect the decision making process of a patient.

Reservation/Booking and Hospitality Services: MTFs facilitate the ease with which medical tourists can fix their appointments as well as sort out their accommodations and other travel arrangements. Besides transportation organization, itineraries for sightseeing during convalescence could be set up by them so that the overall experience is seamless for the patient.

Network Development and Industry Support: They aid in joining together travel agencies with stakeholders from within the medical tourism industry plus health practitioners. It helps in enhancing growth of this segment of trade through associations with government agencies,

Adapting To Emerging Market Challenges: According to the study, MTFs in emerging markets face unique issues, such as how to adjust to shifting industry dynamics and satisfy the various needs of patients from different countries.

Competency For Medical Travel Facilitator



Managing the large and complex areas of global healthcare necessitates a distinct set of abilities and talents. Health care providers working in Multinational Task Forces (MTFs) need to be extremely knowledgeable about a wide range of medical treatments, sensitive to cultural differences, and able to navigate the intricate healthcare systems of several different countries. There are numerous approaches for standardizing healthcare competences, including Global Healthcare Accreditation (GHA), Todd's Guide, ISO 22525:2020, and Thailand Professional Qualification Institute (TPQI). These approaches aim to develop a common set of guidelines and standards for healthcare workers around the world, ensuring that care is consistent and of the best quality.

The ISO 22525:2020 standard sets guidelines for companies that provide medical tourism services. This offers a functional perspective on MTFs' role and is applicable to all service providers in the industry. The standard defines the competencies required for MTFs as general and specific competencies. The investigation found that ISO 22525:2020 provides a general overview of MTF functions and duties, rather than specific categorizations. In order to deliver effective and high-quality medical tourism services, this standard is essential.

General competencies include	Specific competencies entail
Information Sharing	Process division preparation
Cooperation	Facilitator knowledge
Compliance with regulations and insurance	Documentation and contractual

Confidentiality and data protection	Pre-treatment and pre-travel coordination
Risk management	Estimate and amenities
Quality management	Phase management of treatment
Visa arrangements	Phase management following therapy
	supplementary services

Todd has developed a complete framework for individuals and organizations providing medical tourism services. This framework specifies the knowledge, abilities, and competencies that Medical Tourism Facilitators (MTFs) must have in order to provide effective medical tourism services. The framework is a set of rules that MTFs must follow in order to deliver high-quality services to people seeking medical care abroad. By providing a well-structured strategy, the framework can assist MTFs in managing the complications of medical tourism and ensuring that patients receive adequate care and treatment.

Function and duties of the intermediary	MTF competencies as practices
Arranging medical care	Knowledge of physiology, anatomy, pharmacy, basic health history, trip planning, medical services, medical tourism, international health protocols, terminology, medical service commodities, health care resource management, and general medical training
Legal and ethical issues	Skills needed by employees include situation awareness, problem-solving, handling unforeseen circumstances, evaluating, and monitoring.
Understanding business models	Job-specific competences-carrying out all necessary tasks along the medical tourism industry's supply chain
Formulating plans for marketing and customer support	

The Global Healthcare Accreditation (GHA) is a specialized body that certifies and accredits medical/wellness travel, workplace safety, health, and wellbeing. These standards are intended to certify healthcare providers and individuals with expertise in this subject. The Medical Travel Facilitator (MTF) job requires a wide range of abilities that are linked. They cover a wide range of topics, including communication, cultural competency, medical knowledge, and logistical coordination. GHA recognizes the value of these talents and seeks to cultivate and maintain them through its accreditation and certification programs.

The GHA framework emphasizes knowledge, expertise, ethics, communication, Risk and quality management are important aspects of the MTF profession.

Roles and responsibilities in management and leadership	Communication and education with clients
Facilitator commitment	Management of documentation
Client Services	Risk control
Strategic planning (goals, objectives , target)	Business ethics
Supervision of external agreements and contracts	Financial transparency
Durability and enhancement of quality	Marketing transparency
Language support and cultural competence	Safeguarding clients protected personal information

Staffing, staff training, and competency	
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Thailand's professional qualifications Thailand Professional Qualification Institute (TPQI), an independent public organization founded in 2023, will oversee the system. This includes establishing professional standards, implementing evaluation procedures, and allowing individuals or organizations to assess against them. The Occupational Standards and Professional Qualifications for MTF by TPQI comprise ten major competency units along with their corresponding elements. Ten primary competency units are identified by the TPQI. They are:

Destination orientation	Facilitating access to health services
Appointment coordination	Coordination of post-treatment
Quotation preparation	Maintenance of Care
Travel and schedule arrangements	Pre- and post-trip support
Arrival assistance	ongoing assistance for care

22525:2020, Todd, Global Healthcare Accreditation (GHA), and Thailand Professional Qualification Institute (TPQI) units are intended to encompass the full range of responsibilities performed by a Medical Treatment Facility (MTF), with a focus on job skills relevant to the medical tourism supply chain.

CONCLUSION

There are a lot of factors that make medical tourism different from all other people in the world, but many of them do not have any relation to healthcare. This encompasses overseas medical travel facilitators, international accreditation organizations, business-government collaboration and travel and tourism. Medical travel facilitators play a critical role in helping patients looking for treatments abroad. They assist patients to choose the right facility, plan their vacation itinerary and even organize follow-up care when they return home including making logistical arrangements. Although these tasks can be completed by patients themselves simply by searching online or booking through internet platforms, medical travel facilitators have become increasingly important in managing them properly. The research also showed how operational tasks, interpersonal skills, cognitive understanding and ethical principles are essential for success as a medical travel facilitator. It is notable that the complexity of competences necessary within this field was highlighted by this investigation. This report recommends some practical measures such as monitoring supervisors' satisfaction levels with their subordinates and team among others to improve effectiveness of medical tourism facilitation programs according to managers' reports. A different set of skills with clear distinctions from those of the ordinary medical or travel service providers should be possessed by the facilitators. Medical tourism service providers must focus on responding to medical tourists' interests while also offering a variety of programs to assist facilitators in improving their job performance and service attitude. Therefore, internal marketing is crucial in creating a good fit between facilitators and work environment that provides value and happiness to patients. Finally, it has become a central pillar for the medical tourism industry with the facilitating agents making it possible for patients to have positive experiences.

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