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**TOURISM
IN FUNCTION OF DEVELOPMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

Tourism product as a factor of competitiveness of
the Serbian economy and experiences of other countries



**THEMATIC
PROCEEDINGS**

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**UNIVERSITY OF KRAGUJEVAC
FACULTY OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT
AND TOURISM IN VRNJAČKA BANJA**



EXPLORATORY RESEARCH ON DETERMINANTS OF ON LINE INFORMATION PROVIDERS OF MEDICAL TOURISM

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Abstract

Medical Tourism, as one of the main components of international trade in health, has an increasing importance for the developing countries. Medical tourism attracts the attention of many actors of the medical profession, medical tourism facilitators, medical tourism agencies, health analysts and policy makers. Key criteria in selecting specific destinations for medical tourism are primarily the quality and the price of medical services, the accreditation of the facilities, its equipment as well as the attractiveness of the location in terms of tourism. The purpose of the research is exploratory and policy oriented. It is based on predictions of the theoretical literature findings and subsequent analysis of over 78 portals specialized in medical tourism. The questions raised refer to role of government, credibility, ethical concept, content information and internet marketing strategy. Research results point out to the need for further research and development of the national framework on on-line medical tourism information providers in the Republic of Serbia.

Key Words: *medical tourism, portals, facilitators, developing countries, Serbia.*

JEL classification: *I15, L83, Z32*

Introduction

Medical Tourism, as one of the main components of international trade in health, has an increasing importance for developing countries also in the region of Western Balkans economies. “The future of the economies in the region will depend on enhancing their efficiency and performances in industry, service and know-how” (Vapa-Tankosić et al, 2013, p.227).The

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developing countries have registered a significant increase in the number of tourists from developed countries with the potential to become an extraordinary generator of income generation through the provision of additional medical services to foreign customers. Growing demand for medical tourism services in the world is based on the high cost of health services in developed countries. Medical tourism as a major component of international trade in health care attracts the attention of many actors of the medical profession, the agency for the promotion of tourism, health analysts and policy makers. As the services are offered in developing countries the slogan "first-class treatment at Third World prices" may be emphasized (Čavlin & Ignjatijević, 2014). Key criteria in selecting specific destinations for medical tourism are primarily quality and price of medical services, accreditation and state-of-the-art equipment of the health systems, as well as the attractiveness of the location and organization in terms of tourism. The key research objective of the paper is to give an insight and analyze the on line information providers of the latest information technology solutions in medical tourism and to analyze the emergence of specialized Internet sites. The purpose of research is exploratory and policy oriented based on the survey of concerning literature and analysis of on line providers. The research results suggest a need for further styling the role, use and impact of these sites on consumers of health care. This paper points out to further direction of the integrated research on medical tourism and development of the conceptual framework of potential web-based information solutions.

This paper is divided into four parts as follows: overview of medical tourism in the medical tourism sites, discussion of literature related to the Internet and medical tourism; empirical analysis and understanding of the representation medical tourism on the Internet and policy recommendations of developing web based conceptual framework in Serbia.

Literature overview

Qualitative research on Canadian medical tourists have shown that the key factors in the process of deciding on medical treatment abroad are reliable information about the surgeon's reputation abroad as well as the testimonies of other patients who stayed in the hospital. Access to this type of information is bound to increase confidence in consumers' decision-making. (Crooks et al., 2012).

Still little is known on the profile of the consumer of medical tourism services, taking into account the socio-demographic status, age, sex, state of health. It is also important to consider the factors that direct consumer not to use the services of local providers and/or to attract them to foreign providers. Generally, synthesis of existing evidence indicates that the following factors shape "willingness to travel" (WTT)" for the use of medical services outside the country (Exworthy & Peckham, 2006, p. 279):

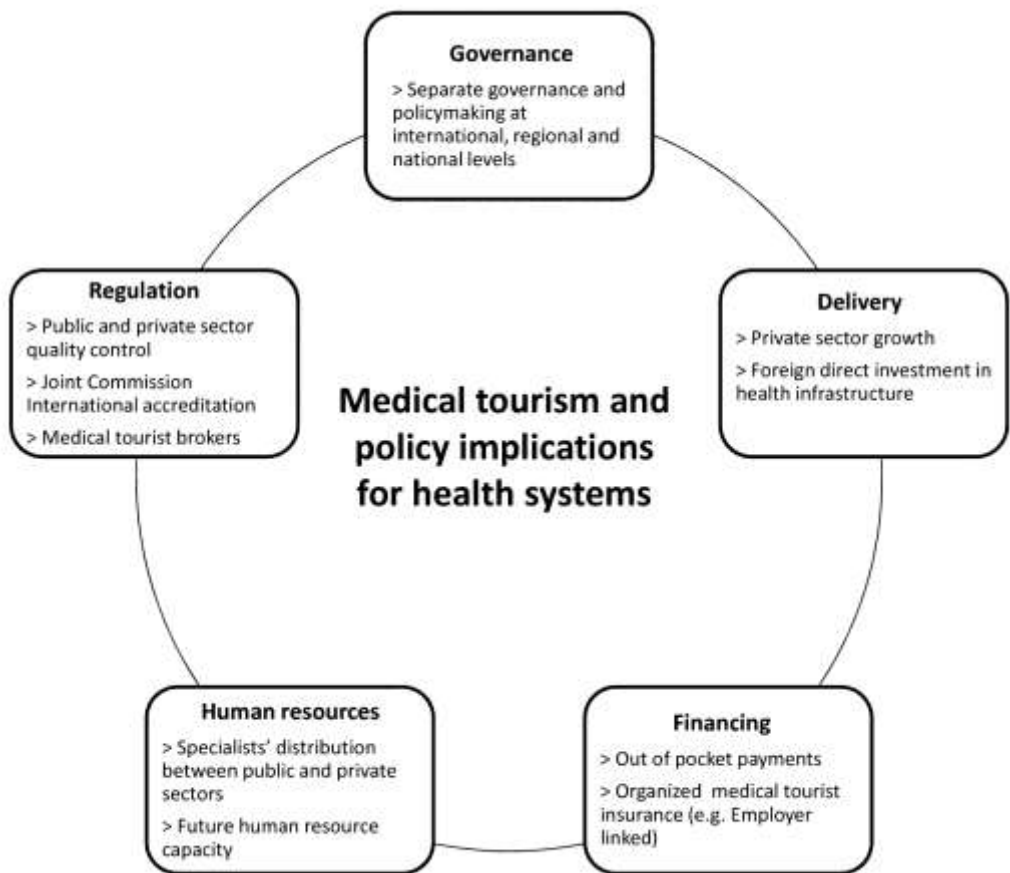
1. Type of Health Care: Specialist health care is associated with higher WTT;
2. Reputation of the hospital/surgeon: a good reputation increases WTT especially among groups with higher incomes;
3. Urgent or serious condition: emergencies associated with higher WTT.
4. Frequency: frequent users of the service may exhibit lower WTT;
5. Gender: Men show higher WTT than women;
6. Age: older people (over 60 years) are associated with lower WTT;
7. Socio-economic status: high status (especially income) is associated with a higher WTT;
8. Responsibility: parents or guardians of minors are associated with lower WTT;
9. Nationality: connection is poor or lower WTT is associated with some minority ethnic groups;
10. Geography: limited comparative evidence WTT in rural and urban areas.

The findings of Wagle (2013) point out to the countries of USA, the UK, India, Canada and Poland as these countries have a largest number of facilitators. The quality of information provided on the portals is self-regulated by the medical tourism facilitators as they play an important role in the patients' choice of provider and information on the health provider is a decisive factor while choosing a hospital. Since these are quite expensive the people search for financing options and can also put mortgage on their home in order to fund these trips. Crowdfunding websites (CrowdRise, Fundly, FundRazr, GiveForward, GoFundMe, Indiegogo Life, Razoo, and YouCaring in the USA) have merged as the common form of solving expenses related to medical care but still they are not transparent enough in fees they charge to donors as well as to prohibit campaigns that make medical claims for unproven medical treatments (Snyder, 2016). For example, since the launch of the website from 2008, Give Forward campaigns have raised over US\$8.8 million,

and about 7600 campaigns for medical and living expenses, caregiver support, funeral costs, pet emergencies, and disaster relief. GoFundMe has the the largest percentage of health-related campaigns, and at You Caring in the area of medical expenses, according to their founders (Sisler, 2012).

The rise of medical tourism in Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia have raised a question of creating a common reference point for issues raised by medical tourism in established and emerging destinations.

Figure 1: *The framework of medical tourism*



Source: *Pocock & Phua, 2011, p.10*

The framework facilitated the identification of the following variables for empirical analysis (Pocock & Phua, 2011, p.10):

1. Governance: the number and content of GATs health sector commitments, the number and size of medical tourist government committees or agencies, availability of medical tourist visa.
2. Delivery: number of hospitals in public and private sector treating foreign patients, consumption of health services by domestic and foreign population (hospital admissions).
3. Financing: medical tourist revenues, type of medical tourist payment (service fee or insurance, level of copayment), foreign direct investment in the health sector.
4. Human resources: doctor and nurse ratios per 1000 population, proportion of specialists in the public and private sectors, number of specialists treating foreign patients.
5. Regulation: number of Joint Commission International accredited hospitals, number of medical tourist visits facilitated by brokers.

Additional considerations to this framework have been integrated by Johnston et al (2015). They included the involvement of international development agencies in facilitating interest in the sector, cyclical mobility of international health human resources, and the significance of health insurance portability in driving the growth of international hospital accreditation. In their latter research on Mexico, Guatemala, and Barbados four common drivers of medical tourism development were identified:

1. unused capacity in existing private hospitals,
2. international portability of health insurance, vis-a-vis international hospital accreditation,
3. internationally trained physicians as both marketable assets and industry entrepreneurs, and
4. promotion of medical tourism by public export development corporations.

Three common inhibitors for the development of the sector:

1. the high expense of market entry,
2. poor sector-wide planning, and
3. structural socio-economic issues such as insecurity or relatively high business costs and financial risks (Johnston et al., 2016, p.9).

The eEurope initiative was launched by the European Commission on 8 th December 1999, with the adoption of the Communication 'eEurope – An Information Society for all (COM (1999), 687 final, of 8.12.1999) '. The European Commission adopted a Communication setting out a set of

Quality Criteria for Health Related Websites. The Communication states that these criteria be tailored according to particular audiences and describes methods of implementing quality criteria. The purpose was to encourage the adoption of a common set of basic quality criteria for health related sites. It outlines the criteria shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Quality Criteria for Health Related Websites*

<p>Transparency and Honesty</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transparency of provider of site – including name, physical address and electronic address of the person or organisation responsible for the site (see Article 5 and 6 Directive 2000/ 31/ EC on Electronic Commerce). - Transparency of purpose and objective of the site - Target audience clearly defined (further detail on purpose, multiple audience could be defined at different levels). - Transparency of all sources of funding for site (grants, sponsors, advertisers, non-profit, voluntary assistance).
<p>Authority</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear statement of sources for all information provided and date of publication of source. - Name and credentials of all human/ institutional providers of information put up on the site, including dates at which credentials were received.
<p>Privacy and data protection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Privacy and data protection policy and system for the processing of personal data, including processing invisible to users, to be clearly defined in accordance with community Data Protection legislation (Directives 95/ 46/ EC and 2002/ 58/ EC).
<p>Updating of information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear and regular updating of the site, with date of up-date clearly displayed for each page and/ or item as relevant. Regular checking of relevance of information.
<p>Accountability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accountability -user feedback, and appropriate oversight responsibility (such as a named quality compliance officer for each site). - Responsible partnering -all efforts should be made to ensure that partnering or linking to other websites is undertaken only with trustworthy

	<p>individuals and organisations who themselves comply with relevant codes of good practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Editorial policy -clear statement describing what procedure was used for selection of content.
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accessibility -attention to guidelines on physical accessibility as well as general findability, search ability, readability, usability, etc.

Source: *eEurope 2002: Quality Criteria for Health related Websites*

The oldest ethical labels is the Health on the Net Foundation (HON) non-Governmental Organization whose goal was to set mechanisms to provide quality, objective and transparent medical information tailored to the needs of the audience. Provost et al. (2006) has attempted to develop a comprehensive and standard quality assessment of health sites, the “WebMedQual”, considering existing guidelines and rating tools, as a scale to assess the quality of health web sites to be further used by health professionals and Internet information providers.

Lunt and Carrera (2011a) have analyzed 50 sites according to HON criteria and British Association of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgeons (BAPRAS) criteria: “the number of years the surgeon had been practicing; the practitioner’s experience with the procedure; the possibility of pre-operative consultation in the UK; professional qualifications and organizational membership; English as a language in the clinic and of the surgeon(s); arrangements for follow-up; details on facilities and backup; information on potential complications and risks rates; details of who will sort out complications and their costs; and details of a body that regulates the clinic or practice” (p.61). Their findings confirm the fact that commercial sites create a need, and motivate the consumer to purchase as they included photographs and modern and hi-tech tours of facilities but it is still unclear how the individuals judge the information retrieved from the websites.

Miller and West (2007) have investigated a sample of 928 people from United States of America in order to determine the frequency of user access to Web sites that provide health information, government (public sector) and non-governmental (private sector) providers and to identify similarities and differences in the characteristics that are associated with the use. More than twice as many respondents have visited private sites (29.6%) compared to public sites (13.2%). However, only 23.6% and

18.9% of private and public website visitors have visited these sites are once in a month or more. Visitors of public and private web sites with higher education diplomas had expressed a higher degree of concern about the availability of health care. Young people who live in urban areas with higher health literacy and expressed higher degree of concern regarding the accessibility (in price) of health care have more frequently visited privately sponsored websites.

Materials and Methodology

One of the key determinants of the modern development of medical tourism globally is to develop an internet platform that provides users with up to date information and easy access to numerous medical information from different providers. The aim of this study is to provide a brief overview of specialized Internet sites. Despite the fact that the phenomenon of medical tourism, with a consequent increase in the number of sites in the field of providing medical services, has been researched increasingly still there is a very limited number of studies, as well as the relevant literature There is still a lack of empirical evidence on the role, use and impact of these sites on the behavior of consumers of health care in the field of e-health.

The authors have performed an online search for specialized medical tourism sites using search engines and keywords. These web sites were examined on the basis of the content and then divided according to the typology. The authors have identified 78portals in English and located their websites. In reviewing their websites we excluded from the study ones that appeared to be inactive. This study of exploratory natures “an exploratory study may not have as rigorous as methodology as it is used in conclusive studies, and sample sizes may be smaller. But it helps to do the exploratory study as methodically as possible, if it is going to be used for major decisions about the way we are going to conduct our next study” (Nargundkar, 2008, p.41).

Discussion and results

A summary of websites included in this analysis is found in Table 2.

Table 2: *Typology of medical tourism portals*

Type	Example
Open portals	www.treatmentabroad.com http://medicaltourism.com/Forms/about-us.aspx http://www.cromedicor.com
Portals of government bodies, tourism organizations, associations or clusters	India's 1st healthcare tourism portal launched by Indian Government: http://www.indiahealthcaretourism.com/ Dubai slobodna zdravstvena zona: http://www.dhcc.ae/Portal/en/home.aspx Dubai Health Experience: http://dxh.ae/ Australian Government: http://smartraveller.gov.au/guide/all-travellers/health/Pages/medical-tourism.aspx Seoul Metropolitan Government: http://english.visitmedikorea.com/eng/seoul/seoulServiceProvider/seoulServiceProvider04.jsp Singapore Tourism Board (STB) in the Ministry of Trade and Industry in Singapore: https://www.stb.gov.sg/industries/healthcare/Pages/Overview.aspx Association for Medical Tourism Development in Croatia: http://cromedicalnetwork.com/ Kvarner Health Tourism Cluster: www.kvarnerhealth.com
Health care providers hospitals or hospital groups	https://www.specialistdentalgroup.com/ http://islandhospital.com/ https://www.wockhardthospitals.com/ https://www.maxhealthcare.in/ https://www.apollohospitals.com/ http://www.fortisescorts.in/ https://www.bumrungrad.com/# https://www.mountelizabeth.com.sg/about-us https://emenders.com/about-us/
Single destination portals (medical tourism + tourism package)	www.beautyinprague.com http://www.phuket-health-travel.com/ http://www.surgeon-and-safari.co.za/
Single treatment	http://www.medicalprague.com/en/about (Prague-Prague-only dental)

portals (dental)	https://www.perfectprofilesclinics.co.uk/ (UK-UK only dental)
Medical Tourism Facilitator– targeted at a single country	http://www.fly2india4health.com/ (India-India) https://www.voyagermed.com/ (US-US) http://doctour.es/# (Spain-Spain) https://www.francemedicalaccess.com/ (France-France) http://www.philmedtourism.com/ (Philippines-Philippines) http://www.travel4treatment.eu/en/ (Croatia-Croatia) http://www.medicalport.org/ (Portugal-Portugal)
Medical tourism facilitators- targeted at multiple countries	http://www.timelymedical.ca/about-us/overview/ (Canada-US and Canada) http://www.bbhealthsolutions.co.uk/ (UK--Turkey) http://www.surgicaltourism.ca (Canada-ndia,USA,Canada and Mexico) http://www.themedicaltouristcompany.com/ (UK-India, Turkey, Spain, Poland, Croatia) http://www.europeanmedicaltourist.com/ (US-Germany, Europe) http://www.allmedicaltourism.com/ (US-Americas, Asia, Europe, Middle East) http://www.medretreat.com/ (US-Argentina,Brazil, Costa Rica,El Salvador, India,Malaysia, Mexico, South Africa,Thailand, Turkey) http://www.placidway.com/ (US-Over 40 Countries) https://www.health-tourism.com/ (US-Latin America, Asia, Europe, Middle East, Africa) http://www.medjourneys.com/about-medjourneys.php (US-24 countries) http://www.gosculptura.com (UK-Argentina) http://ihcproviders.com/ (Canada-Mexico, South America) http://www.passportmedical.com/ (US- Mexico, Costa Rica) http://www.celsusmedical.co.uk/ (UK-Czech Republic) http://www.intermedline.com/ (Romania-Romania, India, Turkey, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and other countries) http://euromedicaltours.com/ (UK-Belgium, Croatia,Greece, Hungary, India, Pakistan, Turkey) http://www.klinikummedicallink.com/ (Germany-Germany, Slovenia, Macedonia) http://www.croatia-medical-travel.com (Croatia-Croatia, Slovenia, Austria).

Portals of Support Services for Medical Tourism	https://www.clements.com , http://www.hcpro.com/ https://www.homewatchcaregivers.com/ http://www.senditcertified.com/ http://www.indushealth.com/corporate-programs/ http://medextra.com/ http://www.medicaltourismtraining.com/about-medical-tourism-training/ http://higowell.com/
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Source: *authors' analysis*

Open (independent) portals

Open portals serve as an entry point for many medical tourism destinations which is consistent with findings of Lunt et al (2010). The consumers can vastly explore providers, the treatments, and compare costs among an providers. “MedicalTourism.com is a free, confidential, independent resource for patients and industry providers. Our mission is to provide a central portal where patients, Medical Tourism providers, hospitals, clinics, employers and insurance companies and information come together - easily, independently and confidentially in the area of medical tourism, dental tourism, and health tourism.” (<http://medicaltourism.com/Forms/about-us.aspx>). The site provides a comparison on prices of a number of surgeries (such as heart bypass, angioplasty, heart valve replacement, hip replacement, hip resurfacing, knee replacement, spinal fusion, dental implant, lap band, gastric sleeve, gastric bypass, hysterectomy, breast implants, rhinoplasty, face lift) in 14 countries (USA, Costa Rica, Colombia, India, Jordan, S. Korea, Mexico, Israel, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Poland, Singapore and Turkey). The patents can request a quote for the treatment listing 3 preferred countries. The patients can firstly explore and Research top Hospitals & Destinations, then Request a Quote, MedicalTourism.com will match their request with the top Hospitals/Providers which shall contact the patient directly to arrange the treatment and finally the patient can compare quotes and finalize the treatment with the Hospital/ Provider of his/her choice. The services of MedicalTourism.com are free and they do not charge patients anything for their services. CroMedicor platform was created with the aim of integrating all areas of health tourism, from treatments to the travel enabling users to quickly and easily finding the required treatment and tourist activities in Croatia.

Public portals of government bodies, tourism organizations, associations or clusters

In the following study cases we can see that the national government has actively taken part and assumed responsibility for the development of medical tourism in the observe countries. The authors can underline the cases of Dubai, India, Seoul and Singapore Tourism Board (STB) where private healthcare providers can receive assistance from the Government to expand their services in target markets. The role of the Government is to foster along with healthcare and travel agencies, an integrated "medical-tourism packages" for foreign patients. From an established world largest health zone in Dubai and quality of therapy, range of procedural and treatment options, infrastructure and skilled doctors to perform any medical procedure with zero waiting time, the list of benefits of travelling for medical destination of India, Singapore, Dubai is quite high. It is interesting to note that Croatia has recently received an award from the International Medical Travel Journal in 2016 for the the Kvarner Health Tourism Cluster which has created a recognizable and competitive health tourism product as one of the first in the Region.(<http://www.kvarnerhealth.hr>).

Portals of health care providers (or corporate hospital groups)

From the year 2000, private companies have set up chains of health clinics across the countries that promise to bring quality to the Indian healthcare system and look at the patient as a customer offering the high level of medical services and state of art technology. They can provide information about particular treatments (e.g. dentistry) and allow customers to search different locations and facilities inside the group or chain of "super-specialty hospitals. Foreign patients have an International Services desk, and the hospital is allied with health insurance providers around the world. International Services desk helps foreign patients with visa arrangements, airport pick-ups, accommodation, travel arrangements and other logistics. The majority of such providers are based in India, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Philippines, Dubai and Thailand.

These hospitals have started corporate initiatives aligned national economic strategy. They perceive the medical tourism as an "export" product. They have also initiated co-branding initiatives in international marketing campaigns with US recognized medical institutions. Johns

Hopkins Medicine International has been affiliated with India's Apollo Hospitals and has a clinic in Singapore. Harvard Medical International is part of Dubai Healthcare City, affiliated with India's Wockhardt Hospital chain, and has several hospitals in China (Turner, 2010).

Portals of Medical Tourism Facilitator or Medical Tourism Agency (targeted at a single country or multiple countries)

The facilitators find an accommodating solution for all of medical and travel-related components and their clients always get personalized service and the option of the first available appointment. They are able to reduce the amount of time and steps involved in order to move from diagnosis to medical treatment. They possess a network of providers to help clients' access timely surgery at affordable prices. In principle they are able to negotiate significant discounts and customary hospital pricing, while still maintaining high patient satisfaction and surgical quality. The facilitators can be domestic and international, based on their network with a destination country. FSFs frequently integrated services together into individual packages (such as an all-inclusive vacation) making the planning easier for potential patients what is in line with findings of Turner (2010) and Dalstrom (2013). These FSFs have in mind that medical travel is complicated because of cultural and logistical barriers as they "attempt to collapse the cultural and social distance between the patient and the doctor through reimagining the patient/doctor relationship as the doctor/consumer relationship operating exclusively on the Internet" (Dalstrom, 2013,p. 28). The five countries with the maximum number of facilitators in recent years were the USA, the UK, India, Canada and Poland. Their representation in the Web depends on the quality of information (self-regulation). The portals can also be evaluated and rated by health professionals or receive accreditation by international bodies. Their information on the health provider is a decisive factor for patients choosing a hospital so they "should ensure that they provide correct information about the education, qualification and years of experience along with the registration details of the provider"(Wagle, 2013,p.32).

Portals of Support Services for Medical Tourism

We have several support services for medical tourism facilitators and patients:

- Insurance solutions to individuals and organizations operating outside their home country (<https://www.clements.com>)

- Expertise in long-term care, accreditation, credentialing, privileging, medical record management, regulatory compliance, nursing, quality/patient safety, and infection control (<http://www.hcpro.com/>)
- Specializes in after-care services (www.homewatchcaregivers.com)
- Provides secure e-solutions for exchanging protected health information among patients, foreign healthcare providers, and pharmacies (<http://www.senditcertified.com/>)
- Global Health Option for employees targeted at corporates by including this option in their employer's health plan. (<http://www.indushealth.com/corporate-programs/>)
- B2B and B2C provider of Supplemental Health Services <http://medextra.com/>
- Global Medical Tourism Training Medical Tourism Training creates and shares solutions to help service providers including facilitators and governments <http://www.medicaltourismtraining.com/>
- Medical and Wellness Tourism Software solution provider (<http://higowell.com/>).

Serbia - Low Cost Medical Tourism: Is the offer of medical tourism service in Serbia visible on the Internet?

The offer medical tourism service in the English language that is visible on the Internet is listed in Table 3.

Table 3: *Typology of medical tourism portals in Serbia*

Type	Example
Open portals	Not present
Portals of government bodies, tourism organizations, associations or clusters	Fond Klaster Zdravstvenog Turizma Vojvodine http://www.spaklaster.org/ Udruženje "Klaster zdravstvenog, velnes i SPA turizma Srbije" http://www.wellnessklaster.rs/
Health care providers private hospitals	Bel Medic http://www.belmedic.rs/ Alfa Medic General Hospital http://en.alfamedic.rs/2014/09/05/international-patients/ Health Centre "Dr Ristić" http://dr-ristic.medigroup.rs/?lang=en

	<p>General hospital - MEDICAL SYSTEM BELGRADE http://www.plasticcosmetic-surgery.net/en/medical-tourism-plastic-cosmetic-surgery.html</p> <p>Sava Perovic Foundation https://www.savaperovic.com/medical_history.htm</p> <p>"Badawi" Polyclinic http://www.badawi-su.net/</p>
Single treatment portals (dental tourism)	<p>Dental plaza http://dentaltoursserbia.com/ A1 Dental Studio http://www.a1dentalstudio.rs/en/</p> <p>Private dental practice „Dr Popovic“ http://drpopovic.com/en/dental-tourism/</p> <p>Dental practice Parodont http://parodont.rs/en/dental-tourism/dental-tourism-in-serbia</p>
Medical Tourism Facilitator	<p>Health and Medical Care Solutions http://www.healthandmedical.eu/za-pacijente</p>
Single destination portals (medical tourism + tourism package)	<p>Derby-Direct http://www.derby-direct.com/medical-tourism/en/medical-tourism-serbia/</p>
Medical Tourism International Facilitator wherein Serbia is listed as a destination for medical tourism	<p>https://www.treatmentabroad.com/destinations/serbia/why-choose-serbia</p> <p>http://www.themedicaltouristcompany.com/medical-tourism-serbia</p> <p>http://www.placidway.com/country/29/Serbia-Medical-Tourism</p> <p>Medical Tourism Serbia http://www.medicserbia.com/categories/Why-Medical-Tourism-in-Serbia-%3FAbout-Serbia/</p> <p>http://www.intermedline.com/blog/medical-tourism-in-romania-medical-tourism-in-serbia-montenegro/</p>
Portals of Support Services for Medical Tourism	<p>Serbia medical tourism guide http://www.medicaltourisminserbia.com/</p> <p>MEDNET SV – Beogradske medicinske ustanove koje nude usluge u oblasti Medicinskog turizma na jednom mestu, http://mednetsv.com/sr/</p>

Source: *authors' analysis*

The number of websites (especially in English) is very limited, and the offer is mainly concentrated on dental tourism and private hospitals. We have observed one medical tourism facilitator and two clusters of medical tourism (integrated offer of wellness and medical tourism). Serbia is represented on the sites of international facilitators (USA, UK, Romania) offering low cost cosmetic surgery, low cost dental treatment, low cost infertility treatment, low cost addiction treatment and low cost eye surgery (<http://www.themedicaltouristcompany.com/medical-tourism-serbia>). As it has been pointed out by Ignjatijević and Čavlin in their earlier study (2016) an increasing number of clinics and other organizations in Serbia recognizes the importance of medical tourism. They have cited some of them such as: "Vista travel," Bel medic, dentist practice Cvejanović, Health and Medical Care Solutions, Panakeia dentist practice, Private specialist dental practice "Dr Kuljača", Colic hospital and many others.

Policy recommendations for Serbia

Republic of Serbia does not possess a specific strategy concept for developing medical tourism, current integrated offer of health medical services is not especially visible on the Internet (with dentistry as well as the most promising area of medical tourism in Serbia). In the Strategy of Tourism Development of the Republic of Serbia for period 2016 - 2025 medical tourism has been outlined as one of the promising strategic tourism products (Strategy of Tourism Development of the Republic of Serbia for period 2016 – 2025, <http://mtt.gov.rs/download/3/strategija.pdf>, p.28). Serbia is also increasing its position on in the field of medical tourism with substantial savings on medical treatments of 35-40% comparable to other medical services in Western Europe. With over 50 health resorts and 1,300 mineral baths, Serbia is a popular medical destination for a variety of medical treatments, procedures, health spas and services. Compared to other countries, Serbia has a strong reputation for professionalism and modern treatment services.

Government role

The national government agencies and policy initiatives have sought to stimulate and promote medical tourism in their countries. The Polish and Hungarian government has in recent EU accession tried to capture the potentials of medical tourism positioning as the medical tourism destination cheaper than European medical facilities (Lunt et al, 2011b).

The role of government in encouraging, developing, structuring and promoting medical tourism in the country of destination varies across nations. Such policies may include (HOPE - European Hospital and Healthcare Federation, p.17): facilitated visa procedures or new medical visa categories; tax incentives; investment in healthcare infrastructure; special organizations solely for boosting the growth of medical tourism industry (either state-funded or private); and subsidies”.

Creating medical tourism portals and the Internet marketing strategy

Internet plays an important role in the overall development of the Strategy for medical tourism. Internet is changing the way people consume medical services, the way we get information and how to evaluate alternatives. Depending on the websites of different providers, there are significant differences in relation to the content of the presented information. Most providers of medical services use the Internet marketing strategy where the ranking is done on the basis of leading search engines like Google, using search engine optimization. Through the use of keywords, inbound links, and adequate promotion strategies for ranking sites, providers of medical tourism shall result in improved visibility. If the site provider of medical tourism in the leading search engines like Google, occupies a higher rank, it will be easier and faster for online users to meet with his range of services for medical tourism. A good Internet marketing strategy will result in an increase in the number of potential clients. This type of marketing strategy creates interaction and creating relationships that result in the exchange of information of beneficiaries of various medical services and procedures, since the vast majority of providers of medical tourism in the first place emphasizes factors such as the high quality of medical services, the latest technology, expertise and reliability of medical staff.

Quality content

EU Directive on electronic commerce 2000/31/EC states that any specific service provider of medical tourism in Europe requires to enable recipients of services and competent bodies simple, direct permanent access to a minimum of the following information: full name of the service provider, address, e-mail, if the service provider is registered in a commercial or similar public register, the data on the commercial register, his registration number, if the activity is subject to regulatory control

information on the competent body. In addition to other information requirements established by Community law, Member States must ensure that the minimum price when referred to the information society, clearly and unambiguously stated in particular should be clearly written. Regarding contracts concluded by electronic means Member States shall ensure that their legal system allows for the conclusion of contracts by electronic means.

Ethical issues

On the portals the information regarding potential risks of a procedure, as well as any risk associated with their travel and stay, should be stated before a decision to use medical tourism has been made. The relevant health regulations and ethical guidelines in the country where the patient is going for treatment must be outlined on the website (Wagle, 2013). Is it necessary to develop stricter international regulations to minimize undesirable outcomes in medical tourism around the world? The question of ethics in the provision of information by the service is also very actual because in many cases the information provided by providers of medical services does not mention the risks of failure of surgery or lack of comprehensive information on the safety of the individual and the outcomes of treatment (Adams et al, 2013). MacReady (2009) pointed to the phenomenon known as stem cell tourism. The problem is particularly serious because it happens that after reviewing sites treatments for stem cell transplantation, severe patients and their families are ready to go to foreign clinics with the hope of improving their condition. In recent times, Chinese clinic stem cells have alleged treated more than 5,000 patients from different countries.

Credibility

Credibility is a very important factor in patient decisions as cost (Crooks, et al. 2011). The quality, accreditation and a system of external assessment at the international level, primarily by the organization JCI (Joint Commission International) and the World Health Organization, represents a good framework for all clinics that provide international medical tourism services to follow. The adherence to such standards shall be cited on their websites in order to raise their credibility. For example, the OECD Health Care Quality Indicators project, which has initiated in 2002, compares the quality of health service provision in the different countries. Krajnović et al (2013) have pointed out to the importance of

establishing a system monitoring and control monitoring quality at national level in all countries that have developed medical tourism, as well as a system of destination management level for tourist destinations on the principles of IQM (Integrated Quality Management).

Conclusion

One of the key determinants of the modern development of medical tourism globally is to develop an independent internet platform that provides users with up to date information and easy access to numerous medical information, as well as advertising from different providers. The authors have tried to analyze the existing sites on medical tourism and to group them in several categories, although some of the sites can have more than one function. What is common for most of them is the description of treatments (photos or videos), details of the establishment, staff qualifications and professional experience, technology (virtual tours of facilities), accreditation, and very often also patient testimonials and recommendation for patients.

The advantages of using medical facilitator are nowadays well known as they are usually professional organizations, founded by professionals with a background in healthcare. They are used by patients for specialist knowledge and expertise (network of best clinics in different countries), to find appropriate treatment often at the best price (access to special prices and discounts that are not available to individuals). They have experience and provide priority when booking clinics, accommodation and flights in order to obtain a complete medical package per consolidated price (no surprises hidden in any other unexpected costs).

The improved market access instruments are aimed toward enabling better conditions for trade and investment, preparing the Western Balkan countries for the EU market and for fostering economic growth (Vapa-Tankosić et al, 2015). In the region, Republic of Croatia has, up till now, achieved major success in building the platform on medical tourism and building a brand as a medical tourism destination. The governments of Western Balkans countries, especially of the Republic of Serbia, shall recognize medical tourism as a potential high revenue sector in the years to come. Is it possible to establish a regional hub of affordable premium medical tourism service in Serbia?

The assistance of international expert bodies in developing a Strategy of medical tourism would be highly recommended. The Internet sites and web based portals in Serbia need to be developed professionally having in mind the good practices of countries with developed medical tourism, in line with the recommendations of OECD, European Commission and criteria of the Health on the Net Foundation, which can serve as precious guidelines.

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