THIRD PARTY IN DECISION MAKING: ROLE OF WEB BASED MEDICAL FACILITATORS IN MEDICAL TOURISM

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Presentation Scheme

1. Introduction
2. Characteristics
3. Materials & Methodology
4. Results
5. Ethical Concerns
6. Conclusion
Background

ITC + Globalization

Emergence of e-health

Cross border availability of medical facilities
Typology of the websites

- Web portals
- Media sites
- Consumer driven sites
- Social networking sites
Introduction

“Using internet is an inherently interactive process that involves users in a continual process of decision making”. (Hardey 1999)

- Presence of these web resources raises important questions about their role and functioning

- How a surfer becomes a consumer of healthcare abroad?
Modes of Medical Tourism

Source: Lydia Gan & James Fredrick 2008
Who is the Medical Tourism Facilitator?

One of the fastest growing sectors in the medical tourism industry is the tourism facilitators or “agents”.

A medical tourism facilitator is an organization that provides seamless combination of all the arrangements required for the medical tourism needs.
About Facilitators

- Form a three-dimensional support to the traveller which is central to the business.
- Dual role- attracting consumers, providing medical services
- They play an important function of bridging the gap between industry players and the consumer.
- Key players in growth of the MT industry
Materials & Methodology

- Facilitator dictionaries and medical tourism websites
  - Medical Tourism Association
  - World medical resources.com

- Review of 208 web portals
  - Over 40 countries
  - Most of them established after 2006, the oldest is established in 2003
 Characteristics

• Medical tourism facilitators choose to differentiate their services in several ways, including the scope of countries and hospitals which they use, or the services they offer.

• All the facilitators are linked to their networked countries which are further linked to the hospitals.
  ▫ Apollo hospital is networked with 55 facilitators across world
Categorization: Scope

- **Domestic**
  - Government facilitators
  - Medical tourism in Tamilnadu
  - Medtravel Costarica

- **International facilitators**
  - One facilitator having network in different countries
  - Medical retreat, or surgical trip of USA
Categorization: Scope.....

MTF I
- Networked with single country
- Eg. America’s med solution

MTF II
- Networked with multiple countries
- Eg. Medical solutions company UK

MTF III
- Branches in different countries
- Eg. Indian portals Sahara and Taj has separate portals for UK and USA.
Categorization: Service Provided

- Medical: 43%
- Cosmetic: 27%
- Dental: 6%
- All: 23%
Top five countries with the number of MTFs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of facilitators</th>
<th>Network with India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33 (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Country differences

**USA**
- Most of the facilitators are international, and they are linked with multiple countries for different kinds of services.

**UK**
- There is a mix of facilitators both domestic as well as international, in domestic it is mostly cosmetic and dental surgery.

**India**
- Most of the facilitators are domestic, as India is itself a destination country.
Country - Differences

- Domestic facilitator from Afghanistan who helps patients to go out to a destination country.
- Where as the facilitators like India, Thailand etc. themselves act as the destination country.

- Most common destination countries
  - India which has links to 81 facilitators
  - Other common destinations, Thailand, Turkey
Why patients choose a facilitator?

- Acts as one stop enabler for medical tourism patients
- They have access to information that the individual medical tourist couldn’t possibly know about.
- Offer lot of choice
- Different strategies to attract consumers
Choosing a facilitator....

- It is evident that people view the Internet as an important source for information on medicines.

- Complete translation of the doctor patient relationship

- Though the facilitators are not directly providing the services they have a role to play in the decision making process.
Ethical Concerns

• Easy entry into the market
• Non health professionals
• Contributors may post information without any quality control
• There are some MTFs like Perfect Profiles who are pioneers of the industry

Continued…..
Ethical Concerns....

- The reliability is questionable
- Confidentiality, security of the consumers
- Selective information is presented
  - After care issue
- Rare mention of the legal issues.
  - Medscapes india

Continued…
Ethical concerns

- No web site has info about patients rights
- No regulation by any private /government organization
- AMA has recently developed some guidelines but not sure about their implementation
Questions...

- Question needs to be asked about the boundaries and responsibilities of the facilitators

- Integrity is of high importance when advising medical tourist where to go

- On what basis they are basing their recommendations?
Conclusion

• These organizations will need to adopt or establish ethical standards to guide their members in ethical conduct, in the areas of research, development, commerce, and practice on the Internet.

• Unfortunately, most of the Medical Tourism Facilitators mushrooming now leave more questions than answers and more problems than solutions.
• Thank you!