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The Factors That Support The Success Of Medical Tourism In Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to find the factors that supported the success of medical tourism in Malaysia. This study is a conceptual paper that reviews the literature from previous studies that have relevance to the factors that support the success of medical tourism in Malaysia. The factors such as healthcare quality, hospital 's brand image, cost competitiveness, government involvement, country knowledge (safe and security, accessibility, price reasonableness) and social aspects factors (word of mouth communication, user generated social media), medical expertise, cultural adaptability, accessibility are the factors that determine the success of medical tourism. At the end of this paper, the author discussed the findings, conclusion, and recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Medical Tourism, Service Culture, Culture Similarity, Cost Competitiveness Country Knowledge

ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari pembuatan artikel ini adalah untuk menemukan faktor-faktor yang mendukung kesuksesan dari medical tourism di Malaysia. Kajian ini dalam bentuk artikel konseptual dimana penulis melakukan review dari kajian-kajian penulisan terdahulu yang terkait dengan faktor-faktor yang mendukung keberhasilan medical tourism di Malaysia. Faktor-faktor seperti kualitas pelayanan Kesehatan, brand image daripada rumah sakit, biaya yang kompetitive, keikutsertaan pemerintah, pengetahuan akan negara dan aspek social, dan kemampuan beradaptasi terhadap budaya merupakan faktor-faktor yang menentukan keberhasilan dari pada medical tourism. Diakhir artikel ini, penulis melakukan diskusi akan penemuan-penemuan, merangkum dan memberikan rekomendasi untuk penelitian mendatang.

Kata Kunci: Pariwisata Medis, Budaya Pelayanan, Kesamaan Budaya, Daya Saing Biaya, Pengetahuan tentang Negara

INTRODUCTION

The fast growth of medical tourism in the past two decades has made the healthcare sector one of the most promising industries worldwide (Eisyok, Cakar, & Kurtulmuşoğlu, 2017),

including in ASEAN. Medical tourism experiences immense growth in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. Especially nowadays, technology, access, and online information play significant roles in the development of medical

tourism (Xu et al.,2020). Medical tourism can be defined as when people go abroad to seek medical treatment (Tosun, Demik, & Saglik, 2020). The reasons behind international patients seek treatment in other countries include quality, value, speed of access to care, attraction of even tourism and involvement relating to the destination of the medical facility (Taheri et al.,2021)

In Malaysia, medical tourism has successfully helped the government transform Malaysia into an upper-middle-income country. By the year-end of 2023, according to the data gathered from Statista (2023), Malaysia's medical tourism revenue is estimated to reach close to 1.3 billion Malaysian Ringgit.

When the financial crisis occurred in some Asian countries in 1997, the medical tourism industry successfully helped the countries' economies because it also had a significant impact on the rise of non-medical sectors (Kiljs et al.,2016). The Malaysian government placed healthcare as one of the country's 12 National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) (Klijs et al., 2016). Malaysia's medical tourism forecasted CAGR at 4.5% from 2021 to 2028 (Fact MR, 2020). At the end of 2028, medical tourism in Malaysia is forecasted to hit 5.1 billion. The revenue from international patients strengthened the national health services, which can also provide benefits for the population, locally, and nationally (Leng, 2010). Malaysia's government has high expectations that the healthcare sector will grow by 127% between 2017 and 2027 (Fitch Solution, 2018; as cited in the Star, 2018).

Accordingly, the Malaysian government allocated RM 25 million to the Medical Healthcare Travel Council to strengthen Malaysia's position as the preferred destination for health tourism in ASEAN, especially for cardiology, oncology, and fertility (Ministry of

Finance Malaysia, 2019). The Malaysian Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) is responsible for the national management of medical tourism and the promotion of selected private hospitals recommended by Malaysia's Ministry of Health for medical tourism (Kiljs et al., 2016).

Besides the excellent contribution revenue of medical tourism to the country throughout the years 2013 to 2022, Malaysia's medical tourism has successfully received many prestigious awards for international recognition, such as 'Best Country in the World for Healthcare', awarded by US-based International Living from 2015 to 2017, and 2019, The UK-based International Medical Travel Journal has also named Malaysia as 'Destination of the Year' for healthcare travel from 2015 to 2017 (MHTC, 2019; The ASEAN Post, 2019); the Asia Pacific Healthcare & Medical Tourism Award, 2021 (MHTC, 2023); and the Stevie Awards (The 19th Annual International Business Awards) (MHTC, 2023).

These achievements have made Malaysia become one of the most preferred destinations for medical tourism in ASEAN (Business Today, 2023). In addition, the healthcare service in Malaysia is affordable for international health seekers (Medical Tourism Malaysia, 2018). However, previous studies reveal that Malaysia needs to improve its medical service to become a regional hub for medical tourists (Nilash, Samad, Manaf, Ahmadi, Rashid, Munshi, Almukadi, Ibrahim, & Hassan, 2019). In addition, Rosnan et al. (2019), through exploratory research, agreed that Malaysia needs to improve its service culture to enable healthcare staff to provide adequate healthcare services to international patients. Even though Malaysia's medical tourism industry has successfully given a tremendous contribution to the national economic

growth, the medical tourism sector in Malaysia needs to improve the medical service to enable Malaysia to become a regional hub for medical tourists (Nilash, Samad, Manaf, Ahmadi, Rashid, Munshi, Almukadi, Ibrahim, & Hassan, 2019).

Previous research highlighted that there were numerous complaints from medical tourists on medical and non-medical aspects (Rosnan et al., 2019) that needed to be handled to face the competition and strengthen the growth of this sector. The evidence from the previous studies stressed that the shortage of healthcare personnel, environmental, and technological aspects of the medical tourism hospitals were the barriers to the hospitals providing excellent services for medical travelers (Abd Manaf, Hussin, Kassim, Alavi, & Dahari, 2015; Nilash et al., 2019). A further problem that faced by Malaysian medical tourism is many international patients come to the hospital only for a short-term visit (Manaf et al., 2015). As reported by The National Transformation Program (NTP, 2016) that Indonesian medical tourists usually search for a basic health screening. Therefore, the number of medical tourists who come to Malaysia doesn't always guarantee high revenue (Bangkok Post, 2014; Nee, 2018).

In addition to the problems above, Malaysia's medical tourism market is dominated by Indonesian patients which counted 60 % of medical travelers in Malaysia (MHTC, 2019). This condition will cause a problem if there is a decline in the percentage of Indonesia patients' arrival in Malaysia due to the improvement of the healthcare system in Indonesia as Indonesia's government has been increasing the country's healthcare expenditures from 2.9% in 2014 to 3.3 % in 2018 (World Bank data, 2019) and urges the hospitals in Indonesia to earn national and international accreditation. Many hospitals in Indonesia have

successfully owned international accreditation which was awarded by Hospital Accreditation Commission, 26 hospitals are under Joint Commission International's (JCI) accreditation, and the rest of the hospitals (private and government) are nationally accredited (Kemenkes, 2019). Accordingly, it is necessary to identify the factors that might influence the success of medical tourism in Malaysia.

Previous Studies on Malaysia Medical Tourism

This research extensively reviewed the literature from previous studies in the medical tourism context, especially that assessed the factors that give an impact on the growth of medical tourists in Malaysia. Past studies showed the variations of the factors that determine the success of medical tourism between one country with another.

Malaysia Health Traveller Council (2023) identified several reasons why international health travelers should visit Malaysia for medical treatment. Those factors are quality, ease of communication, easy accessibility, competitive affordability, easy accessibility, and travel haven as the factors that help the growth of medical tourism in Malaysia. Cham et al (2020), found country-specific aspects of country knowledge (safe and security, accessibility, price reasonableness) and social aspects factors (word of mouth communication, use-generated social media) that influence a medical tourist to revisit Malaysia Medical tourism. Chandran, Puteh, Zainuddin, and Azmi (2018) suggested government involvement (Minister of Tourism and Culture), promotion agency involvement, promote the wellness segment, and focus on specialty service as the key driver for Malaysia's medical tourism.

According to Cham, Lim, and Sigala (2022), there are several factors that influence tourist behavioral intention such as marketing, social influence, and hospital branding. Moreover, in this digital age, patients can easily share their experiences on social media and another kind of online platforms. This electronic word of mouth has a tremendous effect in forming medical traveler's behavior and attitude (Jalilvand & Heidari, 2017).

In India there are five crucial factors that play important role to determine medical tourism sustainability, those factors are, medical expertise, healthcare services, quality, robust private sector and cultural adaptability, and cost competitiveness (Malhotra and Dave, 2022). Farrukh et al. (2020) identified destination image and e-word of mouth are included as crucial factors that matters in medical tourism. In addition, patient's perception of the risk, also influence the intention to seek medical treatment abroad. These three factors influence health seekers to travel. Word of mouth is essential in the service sectors, like medical tourism. Previous study highlights word of mouth in the type of referrals reducing the transaction risk (Musa et al., 2012).

In a marketing point of view, Habibi, Mousavi, Jamali, and Ebrahim (2020) applying the bibliometrics studies found that satisfaction, trust, service quality, destination image, perceived value, trust, service quality, hospitality, experience, expectation, recommendation, motivation, perceived risk, promotion, medical tourism brokers, safety, word of mouth, timing, quality, competition, deliver of care, involvement, patient physician relationship, support network, availability, standards, insurance, and expertise, are among the important factors in medical tourism.

Ganguli and Ebrahim (2017), in Singapore found the factors such as strategic planning, public-private partnership Marketing and branding strategies, Technology and Innovation, Accreditation, governance and human capital development. While, Moghavvemi et al. (2017) identified Interactive online services, admission and medical services, technical items, external activities and hospital Information and facilities are crucial factors for medical tourism.

In Turkey, Esiyok, Cakar, and Kurtulmuşoğlu (2017) incorporation of cultural distance is important in policy planning in medical tourism. Joseph (2017), reveal Hospital Service quality, patients Centeredness, medical Factors, destination factors, tourism factors, physical integrity and privileges received. Wong, Velasamy, and Arshad (2014), identified several factors that supported the successes of medical tourism in Malaysia such as Immigration procedure, affordable cost, less waiting time, relative political stability, minimal language barrier and various tourism attractions, and international accreditation hospitals. In Malaysia, Thailand, and India, Moghaffevi (2028) found several factors such as admission and medical services, interactive online services, technical items, external activities and hospital Information and facilities. In Turkey, Ulas and Anadol (2016) stated that government Support, Infrastructure, cost and capacity, also human resource orientation.

Wonderful Malaysia.com (2019), identified several factors that crucial in the development of medical tourism in Malaysia, such as Value for money, multiculturalism combined with great hospitality, popular highlights Sun, sea & beaches, a great adventure, greatest attractions, cultural heritage, and quality of private care in Malaysia.

METODOLOGY RESEARCH

This study is a conceptual paper, where the author extensively reviews the literatures of previous studies that relate to medical tourism in Malaysia and other countries that focuses on the factors that determine the success of medical tourism.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study has identified several factors that support the success of the medical tourism in Malaysia, based on the extensive review of from past literature. Those factors such as; quality (hospital quality, medic and non-medic quality), ease of communication, easy accessibility, competitive affordability, easy and travel haven, country specific aspect (country knowledge, safe and security, accessibility, price reasonableness), social aspects factors (word of mouth communication, user generated social media, government involvement (Minister of tourism and culture), promotion agency involvement, promote wellness segment, and focus on specialty service.

In the aspect of word of mouth, it is known that word of mouth is significant in developing brand image (Farrukh et al., 2020). Notwithstanding, in this digital era, e-wom is critical factors that influence customer decision to visit the provider. In the relation of medical tourism, patient's online review regarding their experience before and after healthcare service shape the image of the country destination and influence patient's behaviour and attitude (Lee et al., 2002; Farrukh et al., 2020).

Patient satisfaction become one of critical factors in specific and general context. Also as represented the high-quality healthcare services. Therefore, it is important for the healthcare providers to deliver the valuable services to the patients. The valuable services will create good experiences to the patients that they

could share to their friends and family through e-wom or regular word of mouth. Positif word of mouth is as an indicator of patient's loyalty.

Further, factors such as high competition in ASEAN, therefore, to differentiate medical tourism services (Nikbin, Batouei, Iranmanesh, Kim, & Hyun, 2019) from others country is an urgency for Malaysia, especially from Thailand and Singapore. In terms of service differentiation, the halal healthcare service is also medical tourism differentiation for Malaysia since 50 to 99% of 15 countries in Asia are dominated by Moslems (Nikbin et al., 2019). Providing healthcare service with halal orientation to Moslem patients will strengthen the competitive advantage for Malaysian medical tourism. In addition, the similarity in the culture is included as one of the factors that attract medical tourists to visit Malaysia (Esiyok, Çakar & Kurtulmuşoğlu, 2017).

In term of hospital branding, Cham et al (2022) explained that hospital branding has important role to influence patient's decision to visit the healthcare provider. In addition, service quality, the high service quality will give the satisfaction of patients. Excellent service quality also will build patient's trust. Further, regarding to risk perception, word of mouth and destination image are closely link with patients' perception of risk which influence the willingness of patients to travel.

To increase the visitation rate of international patients and to increase Malaysia's medical tourism ranking, it is highly suggested that the hospitals under medical tourism to maintain and high standard of healthcare service quality and competitive service strategy (Nilash et al., 2019). In term quality, Malaysia pursuing International Accreditation, and Highly trained medical professional, Safety Medical Practice, and always

improving Innovation and technology. Debata, Patnaik, Mahapatra, and Sree (2015) Tham (2018), notified that access to hospital facilities is one of the barriers to medical tourism. Therefore, in this study, the accessibility of medical tourist to reach the private hospital in the host country is included as one of the factors that determine the sustainable Malaysia Medical Tourism.

Managing hospital reputation is necessary for healthcare providers to have good perceptions from the patients. Reputation represents the quality of the healthcare service, safety, satisfactory medical outcome, update medical equipment, and technology (Ziemba, Arenberg, Reustle, Allaf & Haldeman, 2019). Accordingly, reputation gives an impact on hospital performance (Fachri, Kartini, & Cahyandito, 2017; Turay, Sany, & Salimon, 2017) and patient decisions to use healthcare services. Therefore, it is recommended for healthcare providers to always to practice medical safety, having Medical and non -Medical qualification, as well as adding the number of Hospitals that have international accreditation. Past studies notified that patients prefer to choose, re-visit, refer and recommend healthcare services to others when the hospital owns a positive reputation (Johnson, 2014; Hibbard et al., 2005; Sheetz, Nathan, & Dimick, 2019). According to the report (Heath, 2019) that 97 percent of the patients give the recommendation to others to use the healthcare provider facility when the healthcare provider are respected. In this manner, hospital reputation closely links with patient's confidence.

Besides reputation, service culture, quality of medic and non-medical, human, and organizational aspects of the healthcare provider's service, several authors suggested perceived value as an important role in

the medical tourism context (Prajitmutita et al). Prajitmutita et al. (2016) found that medical tourists are value-driven, they search for more than the quality of medical service. In addition, Shani, Wang, and Hua (2010) believed perceived value is an important factor that must be exposed in promoting medical tourism. Therefore, providing economic, quality, price, emotion, and social value is supported the sustainability of medical tourism in Malaysia.

Regarding to access of medical tourism, facilitating the medical travellers Journey from the home country to Malaysia through various access, such as media email, phone, Instagram, and face book. Also facilitate access for international health travel to medical tourism hospitals destination. As well as easy access to hostel or hotel nearby.

CONCLUSION

Malaysia's medical tourism has grown tremendously and become one of the drivers of economic growth in the country. The fast growth of medical tourism in Malaysia is supported by several factors such as quality, ease of communication, easy accessibility, competitive affordability, easy and travel haven, country specific aspect (country knowledge, safe and security, accessibility, price reasonableness) and social aspects factors (word of mouth communication, user generated social media.

In addition, government involvement has a significant role in developing the sustainability of medical tourism in Malaysia. The competition of medical tourism in ASEAN is getting fierce. Equally, the medical tourism hospitals are offered similar healthcare services, therefore there is an urgent need for Malaysia medical tourism to differentiate medical tourism services (Nikbin, Batouei, Iranmanesh, Kim, &

Hyun, 2019) to give a better image and high reputation for Malaysia Medical Tourism (Nikbin et al., 2019).

This article is a literature review paper. The authors only did the extensive review on the articles from quality journals and publishers that describe the factors determining the success of medical tourism in Malaysia.

For Practical implication, it is recommended that the hospital managers under medical tourism must put in the effort to establish the strong strategy of the medical tourism key success chain. The healthcare providers must do hard work to design medical tourism quality concept, service culture, online and offline marketing strategy to help the health travellers to visit Malaysia. In addition, the support from the government in terms of policy, procedure, and improving the healthcare infrastructure and technology on medical services determine the competitiveness of medical tourism. In addition, in term to openness to cultural diversity, since the culture of the patients are varies, culture could be a barrier to healthcare service delivery, there is important for the healthcare provider to have cultural and communication skills

Malaysia must always put in effort to promote and make awareness of their services to countries in Asia to be the center of medical tourism in ASEAN. It is suggested that the medical tourism hospital should have websites and social media that provide valuable information that supports medical tourists needs such as hospital services, physician schedule, contact numbers, accommodations services, food, and tourism attraction. Regarding access to medical tourism, facilitating the medical travelers Journey from the home country to Malaysia through various access, such as media email, phone, Instagram, and Facebook. Also facilitate access for international

health travel to medical tourism hospitals. As well as easy access to a hostel or hotel.

This study also gives suggestions for future research. It is suggested that for next research the authors test the direct and indirect relationship between the factors mentioned above that predicts the successes of medical tourism in Malaysia. Subsequently, the author of future research might do the study on a patient's confidence in the relationship to intention to travel for medical treatment abroad. Also, it highly suggested that future research to broaden the scope of the study not only about Malaysian medical tourism, but also medical tourism in other countries, or medical tourism in the global perspective.

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