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THE ROLE AND DEVELOPMENT OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN GENERAL TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the essence and development of medical tourism, global and regional trends, as well as the potential of Uzbekistan in this field.

Keywords: medical tourism, clients, surgery, healthcare, international patients, treatment, surgery.

INTRODUCTION

In our rapidly developing era, patients around the world travel to countries with advanced healthcare systems to find treatment for their illnesses or to undergo various aesthetic surgical procedures. This process has emerged under the name of "medical tourism" and is becoming one of the important segments of the global economy. The main reasons for the rapid development of this particular branch of tourism are the strong marketing potential of countries with developed healthcare systems, predominantly positive customer feedback, and guarantees of service quality. However, the high cost of medical services in such countries also encourages other countries to develop themselves in this direction. For example, today this branch of tourism has reached an unprecedented level of development and continues to grow in countries such as India in Asia, the United States in the Americas, South Africa in Africa, and Germany in Europe. In this regard, medical tourism is also developing in our beautiful homeland, Uzbekistan. An example of this is the fact that Indian students come to our country to study in the field of medicine.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Medical tourism has become one of the fields actively studied by the global scientific community in recent years. The theoretical and practical aspects of this sector have been widely covered in the research of both foreign and domestic scholars.

Reports of the World Health Organization (WHO) describe medical tourism as an economic and social phenomenon formed as a result of the international integration of healthcare services. According to the organization, the development of modern transportation and communication systems has enabled patients to travel freely to other countries for medical treatment.

In international tourism studies, particularly in reports published by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), medical tourism is considered one of the fastest-growing segments of international tourism. These studies identify the quality of medical services, relatively affordable prices, and the introduction of modern medical technologies as the main factors contributing to the development of this sector.

The scientific works of Neil Lunt and Percy T. C. Lau are of great importance in studying the theoretical foundations of medical tourism. They define medical tourism as the cross-border movement of patients seeking high-quality or economically affordable medical services. Their

studies provide an in-depth analysis of the impact of medical tourism on healthcare systems, economies, and international migration processes.

Russian scholars I. V. Sheiman, V. V. Vdovin, V. M. Starodubov, G. E. Bagnenko, and N. A. Semashko have examined the economic efficiency of medical tourism and its impact on healthcare systems. According to them, medical tourism not only promotes the export of medical services but also increases a country's investment attractiveness. These scholars consider medical tourism a complex activity encompassing clinical treatment, rehabilitation, and sanatorium-resort services.

Among local researchers**,** M. T. Aliyeva, B. Sh. Safarov, and A. M. Alimov have studied the prospects for developing medical tourism in Uzbekistan, existing infrastructure opportunities, and mechanisms for attracting foreign patients. Their works identify the country's geostrategic location, qualified medical personnel, and relatively affordable medical services as Uzbekistan's competitive advantages.

RESULTS

Medical tourism is currently one of the most promising and rapidly developing sectors of the global tourism industry. This type of tourism includes travel outside one's place of residence for the purpose of obtaining quality and modern medical services. Medical tourism covers treatment, diagnostics, rehabilitation, and aesthetic surgery services.

According to the Medical Tourism Association, more than 14 million people worldwide travel to other countries each year to obtain medical services. This figure demonstrates the growing economic and social significance of medical tourism at the international level.

Countries leading in medical tourism include India, Germany, the United States, Türkiye, South Korea, and Singapore. These countries attract foreign patients through modern technologies, highly qualified specialists, and medical services that meet international standards. Service quality, treatment effectiveness, and international accreditation systems play a significant role in this process.

Medical tourism has also been developing rapidly in Uzbekistan in recent years. In 2024, nearly 110,000 foreign citizens visited the country for treatment and health improvement purposes, generating approximately USD 174 million in revenue. This figure represents an increase of nearly 40 percent compared to 2023.

The analysis shows that the majority of foreign citizens visiting Uzbekistan for medical services come from Afghanistan and Tajikistan. They mainly travel to the country to undergo complex surgical procedures and receive specialized medical services in traumatology, orthopedics, cardiology, and other fields.

DISCUSSION

The research findings confirm that the development of medical tourism has a positive impact on both the national economy and the healthcare system. In particular, the increase in the flow of foreign patients generates additional foreign currency revenues, creates new jobs, and fosters a healthy competitive environment among medical institutions.

On September 23, 2024, the Resolution No. PQ–35 "On Additional Measures for the Further Development of Medical and Health Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan" was adopted, creating new opportunities for the development of this sector. Within the framework of this resolution, tasks such as the implementation of the "Medical Service Hospitality" program, the establishment of medical tourism clusters, the development of the national "Avicenna" brand, and the expansion of sanatorium-resort zones were defined.

At the same time, several challenges were identified during the study. These include the insufficient development of international marketing activities, limited information resources for

foreign patients, inadequate foreign language proficiency among some healthcare workers, and a lack of experience in working with international patients. These factors may slow down the development of medical tourism.

The analysis indicates that Uzbekistan possesses the necessary natural, economic, and institutional potential for the development of medical tourism. The country's geographical location, relatively affordable medical services, qualified specialists, and government support mechanisms contribute to the further growth of this sector.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the theoretical foundations, development trends, and opportunities of medical tourism in Uzbekistan. The results showed that medical tourism is one of the most promising sectors of the modern tourism industry and makes a significant contribution to the development of the healthcare system and the national economy.

The findings revealed that the development of medical tourism primarily depends on the quality of medical services, the level of technological advancement, the qualifications of healthcare personnel, and the availability of developed infrastructure. In addition, creating a convenient and transparent service system for foreign patients and implementing management mechanisms that comply with international standards are important factors.

The analysis demonstrated that Uzbekistan has sufficient potential for the development of medical tourism. In particular, the country's geographical location, relatively affordable and high-quality medical services, qualified specialists, and government support measures contribute to increasing the competitiveness of this sector.

However, several challenges remain, including insufficient international marketing activities, limited information support for foreign patients, language barriers, and inadequate experience in working with international patients. Addressing these issues is essential for ensuring the sustainable development of medical tourism.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations were developed:

- Introduce quality management and governance systems in medical institutions in accordance with international standards;
- Establish specialized medical tourism centers for foreign patients;
- Create comprehensive and reliable digital information platforms on medical services;
- Improve foreign language proficiency and international patient service skills among healthcare personnel;
- Develop integrated service packages covering treatment, transportation, and accommodation;
- Enhance the national strategy for medical tourism and strengthen international marketing activities;
- Promote cooperation between the public and private sectors and attract greater investment into the industry.

In conclusion, medical tourism is a strategic sector capable of strengthening Uzbekistan's position in the international tourism market, modernizing the healthcare system, and generating additional income for the national economy. The comprehensive and systematic development of this sector will contribute to transforming Uzbekistan into one of the leading medical tourism centers in Central Asia.

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