



### THE GLOBAL HEALTH ISSUES AND MEDICAL TRAVEL: A REVIEW

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the study is to conduct a non-systematic literature review by way of reviewing articles that were found in any of six databases under the terms “medical tourism” or “medical travel” since the year 2000 in order to document the major primary reason for medical tourism and how some specific country’s health providers focus their health services offerings to meet these needs. . This study also identified major dangers in medical tourism and determined why cost, accessibility and quality are the main motivating factors for medical travel. Although lack of data is a major concern and the data available are mainly limited to literature from the perspective of a single country; and, data on medical travel outcomes are not sufficient or not generated using rigorous enough methods for statistical analysis. Therefore, this report documents primarily a range of treatments abroad that most commonly include dental care, cosmetic surgery, fertility treatment, elective surgery and other medical services.

**Keywords:** Hospital Vulnerabilities, Weaknesses, Threats, Medical Tourism, Global Health

## 1. Introduction

Medical Tourism refers to people traveling to a country other than their own to obtain medical treatment because of affordability, better access to care and a higher level of quality of care. The cost of healthcare in the U.S. continues to rise and as a result, many people are prompted to continue to search for destinations outside the country, where they can receive quality healthcare at a much lower rate. In 2016, over 11 million travelers left the shores of the U.S. seeking affordable healthcare in different countries around the world. This figure is estimated to grow by up to 25% every year for the next decade, as the competition for health tourists between countries becomes fiercer. Medical procedures ranging from cosmetic surgery, dental work, to orthopedic surgery can now be provided at high quality and affordable rates in many countries (Medical Tourism Magazine, 2016).

The 2016 report from Medical Tourism Magazine suggested that the number of travelers who enroll in the overseas medical tourism through its platform increased fivefold over the previous year, and more than 500,000 Chinese visitors are expected to participate medical tourism. The top ten medical tourism destinations are Japan, Korea, the U.S., Taiwan, Germany, Singapore, Malaysia, Sweden, Thailand, and India. Regular health checks made up the majority share of the Chinese medical tourism in 2016, representing over 50% of all medical tourism trips for tourists originating in China. Medical tourism is market driven and shaped by the complex interactions of a myriad of medical, economic, social and political forces that set the stage for individuals to embark on a worldwide journey of health care; due to low cost that entices patients from industrialized nations to seek medical care in less developed countries (Horowitz & Rosenweig, 2007).

India is the second most popular medical tourism destination after Thailand and the city of Chennai is regarded as India's Health City, as it attracts 45% of health tourists visiting India and 40% of domestic health tourists. In 2012, an annual growth rate of 30% was recorded indicating it could become a \$2 billion industry by 2015 (Hamid, 2012). In Thailand, healthcare is largely driven by private hospitals and has many advantages over its Asian neighbors when it comes to medical tourism, with the largest private hospital in Southeast Asia and the first hospital in Asia to get a JCI accreditation and ISO 9001 certification. The cost of medical treatment in Thailand is one of the lowest in the world. The huge savings and the fantastic quality of Thailand medical facilities draws many medical tourists to Thailand (Medical Tourism Magazine, 2015).

The medical facilities in Thailand are some of the best in the world equipped with all the latest equipment and facilities for treating even the most difficult illnesses and complete this treatment in

Thailand for an affordable cost. For example, a heart bypass surgery can cost upwards of \$144,000 in the U.S., but the same operation will cost around \$26,000 in Thailand. Also, many private hospitals in Thailand are Joint Commission International (JCI) accredited. On last count, there were 46 of these (as of September 2015). Many more are ISO certified and are in the process of getting a JCI accreditation. Over 350 hospitals have a hospital accreditation from the Ministry of Public Health. All the latest technologies and facilities are available in the largest private hospitals. Thailand has a pool of highly trained doctors, many of whom have studied and/or practiced abroad. With this international experience, they are able to offer the latest and safest medical procedures. They perform a wide range of surgeries including, but not limited to plastic surgeries, cardio thoracic surgeries, pediatric surgery, neurological surgery, dental implants, LASIK, etc. Nearly all of the doctors and most of the nurses speak English. Translator services are also available should you require them (Medical Tourism Magazine, 2015).

Patients going to other Asian countries mostly focus on specialized treatments. But, major Thailand hospitals offer full fledge services under one roof. One major private hospital in Thailand treats 1.2 million patients annually and offers more than 34 specialties. Thailand offers a range of services that even the most demanding foreign medical tourist will find comforting. The vast number of patients that the doctors treat ensures that they have vast experiences, the hospitals are better equipped and the prices are kept low due to the economies of scale. The procedures in Thailand are less cumbersome than many other countries in Asia. Foreigners who travel to Thailand must have a passport that is valid for the next 6 months. Travelers from over 41 countries can stay in Thailand for up to 30 days without a visa. This is also called Visa Exemption. If you are traveling into Thailand overland, you can get in for 15 days without a Visa (Medical Tourism Magazine, 2015).

Those seeking medical treatment abroad should utilize a Health base medical travel agency. Health base medical travel caters to the needs of individual consumers, self-funded businesses, insurance carriers, benefit consultants, insurance agents, and third party administrators seeking affordable medical travel and dental travel options. Health base agencies facilitate a variety of medical tourism services from basic consultations to full service treatment abroad, with a growing network of affiliated institutions to arrange first class services for patients at major internationally accredited hospitals in Thailand, India, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea, Turkey, Belgium, Hungary, Costa Rica, Panama, Brazil, Mexico, USA and is expanding to Canada, UK, Jordan, Taiwan, Argentina, New Zealand, Australia, El Salvador and Guatemala. Health base agencies offer outstanding surgical services at 60-80% less than prevailing USA rates. For example, a Coronary

Artery Bypass Graft (CABG) surgery in the U.S. costs about \$56,000 compared to \$12,900 in Singapore, \$13,250 in Thailand and \$7,000 in India (Healthbase Online Inc., 2006).

The World Health Organization report in 2000 indicates that the U.S. health system spends a higher portion of its gross domestic product than any other country, but ranks 37 out of 191 countries according to its performance. The United Kingdom, which spends just six percent of GDP on health services, ranks 18<sup>th</sup>. Several small countries – San Marino, Andorra, Malta and Singapore are rated closely behind Italy, which holds second place. The report further states that the impact of failures in health systems is most severe on the poor everywhere, who are driven deeper into poverty by lack of financial protection against ill health. However, the main failings of many health systems according to the WHO (2000) are following:

- Many of the health ministry's focus on the public sector and often disregard the frequently much larger private sector health care.
- In many countries, some if not most physicians work simultaneously for the public sector and in private practice. This means the public sector ends up subsidizing unofficial private practice.
- Many governments fail to prevent a "black market" in health, where widespread corruption, bribery, "moonlighting" and other illegal practices flourish. The black markets, which themselves are caused by malfunctioning health systems, and the low income of health workers, further undermine those systems.
- Many health ministry's fail to enforce regulations that they themselves have created or are supposed to implement in the public interest.
- In Europe, health systems in Mediterranean countries, such as France, Italy and Spain are rated higher than others in the continent. Norway is the highest Scandinavian nation, at 11<sup>th</sup>.
- Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica and Cuba are rated highest among the Latin American nations – 22nd, 33rd, 36th and 39th in the world, respectively.
- Singapore is ranked 6<sup>th</sup>, the only Asian country apart from Japan in the top 10 countries.
- In the Pacific, Australia ranks 32 overall, while New Zealand is 41<sup>st</sup>.
- In the Middle East and North Africa, many countries rank highly: Oman is in 8<sup>th</sup> place overall, Saudi Arabia is ranked 26<sup>th</sup>, United Arab Emirates 27th and Morocco, 29<sup>th</sup> (WHO report, 2000).

## 2. Major Problem with Medical Travel

Major problems associated with medical tourism are infection, medication dangers, communication issues, blood supply issues, travel concerns, follow-up care, legal issues, credential issues, hidden costs and ethical concerns. According to Anderson (2016), the risks of infections due to different standards for sanitation is a major problem. Case in point, in 2011, an enzyme associated with extensive antibiotic resistance called New Delhi metallo- $\beta$ -lactamase-1 (NDM-1), endemic in India and Pakistan and spreading worldwide, was found in two people in the Toronto area, one of whom acquired it in Canada. NDM-1 has spread because of worldwide travel, medical tourism and its ability to transfer between bacteria. Infections can occur for a range of reasons, including unsanitary practices and insufficient cleanliness in the facilities. The equipment used during surgery may not be sterile. Bacterial and viral infections are a major risk. In addition, you may end up with a serious disease, such as HIV or hepatitis from dirty needles and surgical equipment. These infections can be permanent issues and may cost a patient his/her life; it is therefore important to inspect the facilities ahead of time.

Medication dangers is another major problems, for example in mainland Southeast Asia, there is an epidemic of counterfeit Artesunate, used for treating malaria and there is evidence suggesting production is being done on an industrial scale and from multiple sources; about 100,000 counterfeit Artesunate tablets were purchased from one large pharmacy. Multiple studies conducted between 2000-2005 sampled blister packs of “Artesunate” and found between 38% and 52% contained no active ingredient (Hall, et.al, 2018).

Communication Issues can be problematic in a foreign land and misunderstandings can lead to serious complications after treatments. Blood Supply Issues - a patient may require a blood transfusion during or after treatment and it is important that it's safe. Much of the time, most foreign medical facilities do not have high screening standards for blood donations. Traveling can increase risk of infection and complications after surgery and follow-up care in foreign medical facilities have different rules for follow-up care and patients who travel abroad for medical treatment may risk returning with complications or infections that require costly treatment, costly both on a personal and societal level. For legal issues, foreign medical facilities may make it difficult to pursue a case and credential issues are a concern also. Foreign medical facilities may have different credential standards. For hidden costs, medical tourism may seem like a less expensive alternative, but it has hidden costs; written agreements with the health care facility or the group arranging the trip, defining what treatments, supplies, and care are covered by the costs of the

trip. And finally, ethical concerns are significant; can you verify that the organ you receive has been obtained in an ethical manner, if not someone could potentially be contributing to the exploitation of lower income populations, teenagers, children or prisoners (Anderson, 2016).

Primary Reason for Medical Tourism and how some specific countries health providers focus their health services offerings to meet these needs

Most of the time, the primary reason for medical tourism has much to do with financial savings, as many believe that a typical procedure may cost at least 50% less in a foreign country than in the country of resident. According to Medical Tourism Magazine (2014), the rising healthcare costs are forcing consumers to search for alternative ways to reduce expenses and at the same time to get their medical service needs met. The reasons people from poor countries traveled to wealthy countries in search for advanced medical treatment is the same as those in wealthy countries, who are also hunting for affordable healthcare cost in less developed areas where it tends to be less expensive.

A survey of the research suggested that Americans are more often going overseas for medical care to poorer countries, as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates about 750,000 Americans go overseas for treatments annually; this is an evolving change, as America was seen in the past as the country to get the best medical care. This has become a cost advantage that everyone is looking for, as the cost of healthcare is becoming unbearable to many people. There are many reasons for medical tourism and there are some specific countries that health providers focus their service offerings to meet certain needs. The most popular destinations for medical tourism vary from year to year which is determined largely by the type of treatment or surgery. However, Mexico, Costa Rica, India, the Czech Republic, Thailand, Malaysia and South Korea are the most often listed as the major destination. Kenneth Research (2019) suggested that the medical tourism market is likely to obtain substantial incremental amounts of dollars until 2025, as they emphasized upon various growth factors contributing towards the growth of the market; specifically evaluating the market size of the global medical tourism market, as well as the market forecast on the basis of geography, which included North America, Latin America, Europe, Asia Pacific and Middle East and Africa.

According to a London business wire latest market research report by Technavio (2019), the global ophthalmology devices market is expected to post a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of close to 4% during the period 2019-2023. CAGR is related to stocks and financial statements of a company and takes the initial and final value and calculates the average compounded growth rate; it hides volatility in the underlying security- it describe the average growth of something over a period

of time. A key factor driving the growth of the global ophthalmology devices market size is the technological advances in ophthalmology devices. With continuous advances in ophthalmic surgical technologies, ocular imaging, measuring, and lenses, technological innovations have transformed the ophthalmology sector. For instance, advances in phacoemulsification and IOL technologies, and the adoption of ultra-short pulse lasers in cataract surgery are significantly improving surgical outcomes. Similarly, contact lenses have undergone improvements, such as the development of new contact lens materials, lens designs, and solution formulations. Such advances in ophthalmology devices are expected to fuel the ophthalmology devices market during the forecast period.

The increasing medical tourism for low-cost ophthalmology has a positive impact on the market and contribute to its growth significantly over the forecast period. This *global ophthalmology devices market* research report also analyzes other important trends and market drivers that will affect market growth over 2019-2023. As a result of these findings, medical tourism has gained immense popularity in recent years, mainly due to the availability of high quality healthcare, lower costs, favorable exchange rates, shorter waiting time, and increased accessibility. For these reasons, developing countries, such as Singapore, India, South Korea, Thailand, and Mexico are popular destinations for medical tourism. Therefore, rise in the quality of medical services and infrastructure in these developing countries is expected to boost medical tourism, thereby, fueling the growth of the global ophthalmology devices market during the forecast period (Technavio, 2019).

This market research report segments the global ophthalmology devices market by product (vision care, ophthalmology surgical devices and ophthalmology diagnostic devices), and geographic regions (North America, Europe, Asia, and ROW). The North American region led the ophthalmology devices market in 2018, followed by Europe, Asia, and ROW respectively. The growth of the ophthalmology devices market in North America can be attributed to factors, such as the rising healthcare expenditure on ocular diseases, increasing number of product approvals, and rise in the adoption of technologically advanced ophthalmology devices.

In terms of geography, the market for global medical tourism is predicted to be held by the Asia Pacific region during the forecast period and this is due to the expensive treatments in the U.S. and European countries. Alternatively, Latin American, the Middle East and Africa are expected to grow significantly. On the basis of treatment, the global medical tourism is segmented into cosmetology, dentistry, cardiology, orthopedic surgery, neurology, and oncology. Only the orthopedic surgery segment is predicted to register the highest growth in the global medical tourism

market in years to come. This global medical tourism market revenue estimation of US \$46.46 billion in 2016 is projected to increase to an estimated value of US \$160.8 billion by the end of 2025 (Grand View Research, Inc., 2019). Furthermore, this report summarized major finds as:

- While Thailand is popular for cosmetic procedures, India is most preferred for cardiovascular and orthopedic procedures. Brazil and Costa Rica, on the other hand, are preferred for dental procedures
- Thailand dominated the market in terms of revenue in 2018 due to the massive difference in treatment cost compared to developed countries. Around 2.4 million people visited Thailand to seek medical care in 2017 owing to low cost and quality medical services
- Singapore, Colombia, Taiwan, and Spain are some of the fastest growing medical tourism destinations in this market. Medical tourism is an important source of revenue generation for these countries, boasting advanced healthcare infrastructure and skilled manpower to cater to international patients
- Bumrungrad International Hospital and Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Ltd. are the leading treatment destinations for medical tourism in Thailand and India, respectively. Other prominent examples include Mexicali Bariatric Center in Mexico and TMC Fertility in Malaysia. (Grand View Research, Inc. 2019, p. 2).

The global medical tourism market is segmented based on country outlook revenue in USD in table 1 below according to Grand View Research (2019). Thailand dominated this market in terms of revenue in 2018, due to low cost and quality medical services offered in the country and ranked 18<sup>th</sup> in the International Healthcare Research Center's Medical Tourism Index. Thailand is also ranked 13<sup>th</sup> on the same index in terms of quality of facilities and services provided, due to well-developed healthcare infrastructure and increasing number of medical professional. The country is also home to Asia's largest private hospital, Bumrungrad International Hospital, which is also the first hospital to receive a JCI accreditation and ISO 9001 certification.



**Table 1: Medical Tourism Country Outlook (Revenue, USD Million, 2015 – 2026)**

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- Thailand
  - India
  - Costa Rica
  - Mexico
  - Malaysia
  - Singapore
  - Brazil
  - Colombia
  - Turkey
  - Taiwan
  - South Korea
  - Czech Republic
  - Spain
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Another major finding area is medical devices, according to New Your Globe Newswire (2019,) is the global IoT medical devices market that was reported to be approximately USD 23,215 million in 2018 and expected to generate around USD 62,694 million by 2025 at a CAGR of around 15.27% between 2019-2025. The Internet is expected transform the conventional paper-based healthcare treatment by simplifying the access to real-time patient data and remote monitoring. Also, performance of healthcare providers is expected to improve considerably due to the emergence of digitalization in the healthcare sector through IoT technology and IoT medical devices or smart healthcare devices that are connected through actuators, sensors, and network communication technologies to interconnect doctors, patients, and clinicians. The findings suggested that the introduction of IoT medical devices, and the operational burden on healthcare providers has been reduced along with helping in the delivery of better healthcare facilities, through improved communication, to patients; and, availability of advanced technology has replaced the traditional diagnosis and treatment procedures with IoT medical devices (Globe Newswire, 2019).

### 3. Summary and Conclusion

According to Frieden (2018), the number of U.S. tourists traveling out of the country for medical care reached as high as nearly 24 million in 2017; and, about 2.6 to 3.4 million Americans have been leaving the country each year to purposely consume medical services elsewhere. The majority of those trips, have been patients in the Southwestern U.S. traveling to Mexico for low-cost, high-value medical and dental care. And currently, there is only one health insurer that will pay for such travel. Also suggested was that the amount of spending by those U.S. citizens in foreign destinations is 0.001% of the trillions of dollars spent in the U.S. on healthcare.

There are many factors that can influence the decision on medical travel. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016), the main reason why people travel to another country is due to cheaper treatment; others may be those who are interested in certain procedures or therapy that may not be available in the U.S. Most of the time, the most common procedures that people undergo on medical tourism include cosmetic surgery, dentistry, and or heart surgery. However, specific risks of medical tourism depend on the area being visited and the procedures performed with some general issues been identified as the following:

- Communication may be a problem. Receiving care at a facility where you do not speak the language fluently might increase the chance that misunderstandings will arise about your care.
- Medication may be counterfeit or of poor quality in some countries.
- Antibiotic resistance is a global problem, and resistant bacteria may be more common in other countries than in the United States.
- Flying after surgery can increase the risk for blood clots.

Youngman (2018), suggested that China is becoming the world's largest source of international travelers; in the first 6 months of 2018, about 80 million worldwide outbound border crossings were made by China's passport holders, which represents a growth rate of 16.4%, as reported by the China Outbound Tourism Research Institute (COTRI). COTRI's forecast in 2018 was total of 154 million Chinese, arriving in all destinations worldwide, representing a total of a 6% yearly increase against 2017's total of 145 million. Growth between January 2018 and June 2018 has seen a tremendous increase and the end of the year forecast was revised to 160 million annual border crossings made by mainland Chinese passport holders, consisting of 75 (47%) million arrivals to other Greater China destinations and 85 (53%) million in destinations in the rest of the world. By 2020, it is predicted that nearly 190 million Chinese will travel internationally, and they will spend U.S. \$350 billion per year. Youngman (2018) stated the following:

China's interest in global tourism is great enough to have set up the Beijing-based World Tourism Cities Federation (WTTCF). This could be a new rival to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), as China apparently feels that this United Nation's Spain-based subsidiary is too linked to Russia, the U.S. and Europe. WTTCF says global tourists made 11.9 billion trips last year overall, which generated US \$5.3 trillion in tourism dollars and accounted for 6.7% of the worldwide GDP. It has released a Market Research Report on Chinese Outbound Tourist (City) Consumption (2017-2018), which systematically analyses the new changes and new trends of China's outbound

tourism market. WTCF aims to help overseas tourism cities and related tourism institutions understand Chinese outbound tourists. The report explains Chinese outbound tourists' behavior and habits and their specific travel requirements. It also includes suggestions to overseas cities on how improve and strengthen the provision of related tourism products and services, to attract Chinese tourists and achieve organic and healthy development in the global tourism market (p. 2).

The specialties most sought by medical tourists, include dentistry (42%), gynecology (22%), preventive medicine (16%), plastic surgery (10%), orthopedics, and bariatrics. Other specialties include general surgery and dermatology. One of the best things about traveling to Costa Rica for medical care is that you save money without cutting quality. On average, medical tourists save 40-70 percent by getting a procedure done in Costa Rica. For example, a dental crown in the U.S. typically costs around \$1,000, while in Costa Rica it is \$500; a dental implant runs around \$3,000 in the U.S. and is \$900 in Costa Rica. With more serious medical work, the price goes up and the savings are larger.

Traveling to Costa Rica for a medical procedure also allows you to explore a foreign land. Costa Rica is a vibrant country that draws people from around the world. They come to hike in its rainforests, lounge along its beaches, and relax in its hot springs. It is also a place with more biodiversity than most everywhere on Earth—during your time here, you may spot monkeys hanging from trees or herons walking through estuaries. The waiting time for medical procedures in Costa Rica is minimal. As opposed to places like Canada, where you may have to wait several months for surgery procedures, in Costa Rica the procedures can be arranged to fit your schedule. The doctors and clinicians are flexible and are sometimes willing to adjust their schedule to see a foreign patient (Yan, 2018)

Costa Rica also benefits from medical tourism. In 2011, the average medical tourist to Costa Rica spent \$7,000—in total, the industry brought in \$337.7 million USD in revenue that year. Needless to say, this is a huge boon to the Costa Rican economy. Considering the country's small size, medical tourism can have a widespread impact. The added revenue helps build better medical facilities and increases the funding for public services like schools and hospitals. Another benefit of medical tourism for Costa Rica is a phenomenon that some have termed the “reverse brain drain.” This phrase refers to doctors and dentists who are trained at universities in the U.S. or Canada and return home to open a practice and educate their peers (Youngman, 2018).

According a 2019 update from Patients Beyond Borders website on medical tourism statistics, Out-of-pocket medical costs of critical and elective procedures continue to rise, while nations offering

universal care are faced with ever-increasing resource burdens. These drivers are forcing patients to pursue cross-border healthcare options either to save money or to avoid long waits for treatment. The worldwide medical tourism market is estimated to grow at a rate of 15-25%, with inbound patient flows highest in Mexico, Southeast and South Asia. When using U.S. costs across a variety of specialties and procedures as a benchmark, average range of savings for the most-traveled destinations are as follows:

- Brazil: 20-30%
- Costa Rica: 45-65%
- India: 65-90%
- Malaysia: 65-80%
- Mexico: 40-65%
- Singapore: 25-40%
- South Korea: 30-45%
- Taiwan: 40-55%
- Thailand: 50-75%
- Turkey: 50-65%

International accreditation is becoming one of the biggest drivers in the growth of the medical tourism market. As a result of this, the US-based Joint Commission launched its international affiliate agency in 1999, the Joint Commission International (JCI). In order to be accredited by the JCI, an international hospital must meet the same set of rigorous standards set forth in the U.S. by the Joint Commission. More than 950 hospitals and clinical departments around the world have now been awarded JCI accreditation and that number is growing by about 20% per year. Other established agencies that accredit outpatient clinics, such as The Accreditation Association of Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHC) and The American Association for Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgery Facilities (AAASF) have launched international initiatives that address ambulatory care.

#### **4. Recommendations**

It is evident that growth in medical travel has implications for health service provision in destination countries and access to health care for local residents might be adversely affected if local health professionals devote their time to treatment of foreigners, rather than local communities. However, medical travel potential benefits include, but are not limited to improved care, decreased costs and reduced waiting times; it may increase access to certain treatments for

local communities through improved infrastructure and higher demand. Risks are involved in medical travel, compared to obtaining treatment domestically. For example, if complications or adverse outcomes occur, additional expenses are likely and insurance companies may not be willing to cover these costs. Also, medical travel may jeopardize the well-being of vulnerable individuals who are ill, and are now subjected to unfamiliar locations or cultures and who lack social support. Factors such as social support, familiarity with language and proximity to home can be important for recovery from clinical procedures. Medical travel often involves travel from high-income to low- or middle-income countries with different standards of clinical practice (WHO, 2014).

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CDC (2016), if someone is planning to travel to another country for medical care, it is advisable for such person to consult with a travel medicine practitioner at least 4–6 weeks before the trip to discuss general information for healthy travel and specific risks related to the procedure and travel before and after the procedure. Also, that person must make sure that they adhere to the following precautions carefully:

- Make sure that any current medical conditions you have are well controlled, and that your regular health care provider knows about your plans for travel and medical care overseas.
- Check the qualifications of the health care providers who will be performing the procedure and the credentials of the facility where the procedure will be executed. Remember that foreign standards for health care providers and facilities may be different from those of the United States. Accrediting groups, including Joint Commission International, DNV International Accreditation for Hospitals, and the International Society for Quality in Healthcare, have lists of standards that facilities need to meet to be accredited.
- Make sure that you have a written agreement with the health care facility or the group arranging the trip, defining what treatments, supplies, and care covered by the costs of the trip.
- If you go to a country where you do not speak the language, determine ahead of time how you will communicate with your doctor and other people who are caring for you.
- Take with you copies of your medical records that include the lab and other studies done related to the condition for which you are obtaining care and any allergies you may have.
- Bring copies of all your prescriptions and a list of all the medicines you take, including their brand names, generic names, manufacturers, and dosages.
- Arrange for follow-up care with your local health care provider before you leave.
- Before planning vacation activities, such as sunbathing, drinking alcohol, swimming, or taking long tours, find out if those activities are permitted after surgery.

- Get copies of all your medical records before you return home.

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