

## Barbados' Medical Tourism Sector

### What is medical tourism?

Medical tourism occurs when patients travel internationally with the intention of obtaining privately funded medical care. Our research team, based at Simon Fraser University (in British Columbia, Canada), studies medical tourism from a number of perspectives.

### What trends are occurring in Barbados' medical tourism industry?

Barbados is a tourism-dependent island nation with a growing private health care industry. Its government is promoting the development of a medical tourism sector in order to diversify the economy, attract investment, further develop the health care system, and retain health workers. Critics assert that this sector may drive up the cost of medical care for locals and encourage domestic care providers to move into higher-paying private hospitals. As the industry is at a nascent stage it is currently unclear what the impacts of an expanded medical tourism sector in Barbados will be.

### What our research is showing about the impacts of medical tourism in Barbados:

Our qualitative research has identified some of the trends and possible impacts of medical tourism on Barbados' health system.

- The Barbados government, local and off-shore physicians, the private sector, and off-shore investors have collectively set the momentum and trajectory for development of a medical tourism sector in the country.
- Barbados has two existing specialty clinics that engage in medical tourism, one that specializes in fertility treatments and one that provides a range of services. Recently, the national government approved the lease of a site on the North end of the island to a private corporation based out of the United States that plans to open a hospital that will cater to medical tourists seeking a range of surgical procedures.
- Currently, Barbados has a significant outward flow of nurses to the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada, which results in shortages of nurses locally and a significant loss of public investment. Some stakeholders in Barbados' medical tourism sector are concerned that new medical tourism facilities will rely on hiring nurses and other health workers from other countries to meet staffing needs while other stakeholders see potential for these same facilities to offer jobs to trained local health workers.
- Stakeholder perception of developing a medical tourism sector is somewhat positive, particularly with respect to new employment and training opportunities for locals. Concern has been expressed regarding potential for the sector to lengthen wait times for medical care in the public sector by draining staff and resources from public facilities.
- Given the threat that medical tourism poses to health equity, government action is needed to ensure that developments in the medical tourism sector benefit Barbados' citizens and their health. Management and regulation of the industry could allow Barbados to reap economic benefits while protecting the public health system.

For more information: [www.sfu.ca/medicaltourism/](http://www.sfu.ca/medicaltourism/)

Contact us: [medtour@sfu.ca](mailto:medtour@sfu.ca)

© 2012, SFU Medical Tourism Research Group, British Columbia, Canada