

Canadian Medical Tourism Facilitators' Business Practices

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 role do medical tourism facilitators play in the industry?

Medical tourism facilitators are businesspeople that arrange for medical care abroad and can book travel and accommodation services for medical tourists. The roles of facilitators based in Canada are not clearly delineated. While some play a limited role as a 'middleman' who strictly connects care providers and patients, others perceive themselves more expansively as advocates for their clients going abroad for medical care. There is significant variation in the roles played by medical tourism facilitators in Canada, in part due to a lack of standardized training, professional norms, and regulation.

What our research is showing about the business practices of Canadian medical tourism facilitators:

Our qualitative research has identified some trends in the business practices of Canadian medical tourism facilitators.

- Medical tourism facilitators in Canada report rapid growth in their numbers of clients in recent years. They are reached by their clients primarily through word-of-mouth, and through internet channels.
- Canadian medical tourism facilitator websites are focused on marketing to prospective medical tourists rather than providing information for those who have already made bookings. There is little information provided about risks, including to clients' health and safety, and pricing details are not always shared.
- Some medical tourists who use facilitators to arrange for care abroad rely solely on the facilitator for information about their treatment, destination, and physician abroad.
- The coordination of surgical aftercare for patients returning to Canada from medical care abroad varies between facilitators. Some facilitators play a role in scheduling aftercare, some liaise between doctors abroad and at home, and others actively avoid participating in the aftercare arrangements of clients.
- In some cases facilitators have described having a somewhat antagonistic relationship with Canadian physicians. This is because some physicians discourage individuals from going abroad for care. Meanwhile, Canadian medical tourism facilitators commonly view themselves as providing an alternative for individuals who are frustrated with domestic health care systems.
- Some medical tourism industry members, both within and beyond Canada, have identified a need for greater standardization and regulation of medical tourism facilitation.

For more information: www.sfu.ca/medicaltourism/

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