

Outbound Medical Tourism from Mongolia

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 impacts is outbound medical tourism having on Mongolia?

In developing countries like Mongolia, medical tourism has been driven by increasing access to a globalizing health care industry that offers patients new medical care options. Travel outside of Mongolia for medical care has significant impacts on Mongolians' individual health and on the national health care system. Medical tourism may also provide an impetus for health system reform in Mongolia, as the government acknowledges that resources need to be better allocated in order to keep Mongolians in the national health system. At the same time, resources for improvement of the local health system are growing, but limited, and the personal savings of many Mongolians and their families are being drained by engaging in medical tourism.

What our research is showing about outbound medical tourism from Mongolia:

Our qualitative research has identified several trends related to the practice of outbound medical tourism from Mongolia, and some of the ways in which these trends are impacting Mongolian citizens, their expectations of the health system, and the health system itself.

- Some clinicians and health care administrators think that developing a more patient-centered approach in Mongolia's public health care system will lessen engagement in medical tourism by Mongolian patients. It is thought that one of the main reasons that Mongolian patients go abroad is because they are dissatisfied with how they are treated in the public health care system. If these issues are addressed through system reforms that focus on improving provider-patient relations, patients may be more willing to access medical care domestically.
- The Mongolian health care system is perceived by some to be highly political. Personal connections with health care administrators, clinicians, and political figures may be used by some patients to gain access to better or faster medical care locally. It is thought that the outflow of Mongolian patients through medical tourism may act as an impetus for health system reforms, ultimately reducing the influence of personal connections on access to health care as the government seeks to retain patients.
- The Mongolian health care system has a poor reputation in some domestic circles, being perceived as ineffective, inefficient, and/or of low quality. While this view is certainly not held by all Mongolians, it is acknowledged that this perception motivates some patients to pursue medical care in other countries. It is thought that if this perception can be changed by improving the reputation of the Mongolian health system domestically, fewer Mongolians will travel abroad for care.
- Creating new types of private medical care in Mongolia (e.g., private hospitals) is seen to be one way of retaining local patients who would otherwise travel abroad for medical care.

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

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