

Jamaica's Growing 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 Jamaica's medical tourism industry?

Located in the Caribbean, Jamaica is an upper-middle-income island state situated in the Greater Antilles. Medical tourism in Jamaica remains in somewhat of a nascent stage, although it is viewed as a natural fit for the Jamaican economy given the country's robust tourism and healthcare sectors. Medical tourism is actively supported by the national government, promoted in particular by the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Tourism. Our research illuminates two prominent and competing visions for the development of Jamaica's medical tourism sector: the first views medical tourism as an additional market for existing private hospitals, the second proposes new facilities be built to primarily serve medical tourists.

What our research is showing about the current state of medical tourism in Jamaica:

Through our qualitative research we have identified several actors and activities contributing to medical tourism in Jamaica:

- The governance of medical tourism in Jamaica is led by a national government investment and promotion corporation (JAMPRO) and grounded in the liberalization of the healthcare sector; medical tourism is pursued primarily as an economic, not a health system, development project. International aid organizations are also involved in the development of medical tourism in Jamaica, dedicating resources for economic development towards promoting medical tourism.
- Currently, medical tourism in Jamaica is financed by private out-of-pocket payments, although access to an increasingly portable American and European health insurance market is viewed as the long-term goal. However, the lack of local medical facilities with international accreditation, compounded by the significant financial costs to undergo the process of obtaining accreditations pose as barriers.
- Jamaican health workers are viewed in high regard in many other countries, which is reflected in the extraordinarily high rates of international health worker emigration. Proponents present medical tourism as an opportunity to reduce health worker migration by increasing the financial incentive to stay in country, although this may be offset by subsequent flows of qualified and senior care providers from the public to the private sectors.
- Despite a marked effort to attract international visitors from under- or un-insured patients from the United States, Jamaican diaspora represent the majority of medical travelers to the country. While the economic benefits of medical tourism may seem apparent, it is important that the development of the industry does not compromise health equity.

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

Contact us: medtour@sfu.ca

© 2014, SFU Medical Tourism Research Group, British Columbia, Canada