Implications for the NHS of inward and outward medical tourism: a policy and economic analysis using literature review and mixed-methods approaches


Record Status
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Citation

Authors’ objectives
To generate a comprehensive documentary review; to better understand information, marketing and advertising practices; examine the magnitude and economic and health-related consequences of travel; understand decision-making frames and assessments of risk; understand treatment experience; elicit the perspectives of key stakeholder groups; and map out medical tourism development within the UK.

Authors’ conclusions
In 2010 at least 63,000 residents of the UK travelled abroad for medical treatment and at least 52,000 residents of foreign countries travelled to the UK for treatment. Inward referral and flows of international patients are shaped by clinical networks and longstanding relationships that are fostered between clinicians within sender countries and their NHS counterparts. Our research demonstrated a range of different models that providers market and by which patients travel to receive treatment. There are clearly legal uncertainties at the interface of these and clinical provision. Patients are now travelling to further or ‘new’ markets in medical tourism. Future research should: seek to better understand the medium- and long-term health and social outcomes of treatment for those who travel from the UK for medical treatment; generate more robust data that better capture the size and flows of medical travel; seek to better understand inward flows of medical travellers; gather a greater level of information on patients, including their origins, procedures and outcomes, to allow for the development of better economic costing; explore further the issues of clinical relationships and networks; and consider the importance of the NHS brand.

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