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Author

The Handbook of Medical Tourism Program Development

How Well Do You Know Your Medical Tourism Customer?

MEDICAL TOURISM MONOGRAPHS™
From Maria Todd

USA \$4.95

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Handbook of Medical Tourism Program Development

Developing Globally Integrated Health Systems



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Asking a stranger to travel to a distant place to give consent for some stranger they have never met before to cut them open, or even to inject a toxin into their face for cosmetic effect is a big request.

Let's imagine for a moment that you want to offer your website visitors and prospective clients the opportunity to explore your unique medical tourism experiential product that includes every touchpoint in the experience from wheels down to wheels up. So far, after having consulted to healthcare facilities, practitioners, governments, investors, hotels, and tourism authorities about destination and product development for medical tourism, I have yet to find many that have organized their medical or dental tourism business to be able to create a "product" that is fully inclusive and controls the experience from wheels down to wheels up.

First, let's revisit the definition of medical tourism:

Health tourism is an experiential product that offers an unforgettable visitor experience. It is produced by combining carefully coordinated travel to a destination, an opportunity to enjoy the hospitality of its people, its culture and its history, the rest and rejuvenation of its accommodations, the unique flavors and recipes of local and regional gastronomy, and the precision and compassion its health services providers working collaboratively. Together, they produce the elements to create a unique visitor experience and story-telling value that will be shared for generations.

Buyers of medical tourism want a complete solution, not a silo of air travel, another of hotel or alternative accommodation, another of doctor, and another of facility. That's not a product. It is an agglomeration. One cannot write a check to buy it, therefore the price will always be different from what is being advertised - causing the amygdala to perceive risk of bait and switch, vulnerability, and unmet expectations that could possibly lead to breakdowns in quality, safety and confidence in the product. At that point, all logical reasoning about why one competitor's medical tourism product is superior to another competitor's is eclipsed by the amygdala. The amygdala, as a seat of emotion processing and information relay, is a likely candidate for dysfunction in health tourism marketing.

It is the job of the amygdala to protect an individual from such tremendous perceived risk and to decide fight or flight. All the logical words in your content marketing, advertising, website are eclipsed by the body's risk management center and neurohormones (oxytocin and dopamine) and in turn, can amplify any aberrance that may be present in social cognition. This can ultimately negate any marketing, advertising, accreditation or certification and guide social responses to your words, advertisements and website presentation of your medical tourism product. It can also engender a neural milieu that improperly assigns emotional salience to the advertising stimuli. This deficit, in turn, can result in aberrant social cognition that may ultimately lead to misguided social responses from withdrawal and purchase resistance to confusion, overwhelm, and suspicion.

About those Numbers...

Upon critical evaluation and analysis from this angle, one has to wonder if the market for medical tourism is

as big as some publishers and medical tourism trade associations claim it to be.

When I apply the neuromarketing perspective and my training in anatomy and physiology and knowledge about how the brain processes the advertising messages and branding for medical tourism, I assert openly that many of the statistics about past, current and future medical tourism traffic, claimed market size, past and future revenue potential and other market size and growth indicators are pure and simple nonsense.

4-Point Check on Data Integrity

I challenge any publisher of these nonsensical statistics to prove their claims. Show me unbiased, audited numbers. Show me what raw data was collected and included in these numbers and reveal its primary source and the qualifications and competency of the data analyst and interpreter. That's where the rubber meets the road. They cannot.

How might we otherwise measure the medical tourism market?

If we cannot know or trust the advertised global medical tourism market size from the publishers of said data, let's put the global data aside and find another way to measure growth, potential market size and trends.

In medical tourism hospitals and clinics around the world, I have not encountered any hospital (single or chain of hospitals) that can give me this data on demand. That's saying a lot when you think of how much many of them have invested in event sponsorships, hiring congress and event exhibitor stands, paying for placement in medical tourism country and destination guidebooks like those by authors Carlos Arceo (Mexico) or Josef Woodman, or buying pay-per-click advertising on websites like PlacidWay and its competitors, or published in destination directories like those assembled by Renee Stephano of the MTA, or buying proprietary medical tourism certifications from the MTA, MTQua, Temos, Medical Travel Commission™ (website no longer functional), Global Clinic Ratings, and many others who have launched proprietary medical tourism rating and listing directories that patients and third-party buyers of healthcare services may not recognize, trust or deem valuable.

Measured results from different marketing investments

In private consultations, hospital owners, executives and managers and the independent doctors and dentists tell me that the results of these marketing strategies have not produced much in the way of return on marketing investment (ROMI) that they can point to and say "That investment in particular is the one that produced this specific revenue for my business."

So fine. Let's push those above-listed marketing and advertising efforts and tactics (certifications, exhibits and sponsorship, and directory and guidebook listings) and the question of "How large is the medical tourism market, really?" to the side.

Maybe it is not all that necessary to know how large the universe of medical tourism traffic is after all?

**A meaningful data set is all we really need.
But it isn't something you can buy from report brokers. It is data
you already own if you did your homework.**

As a consultant, I always attempt to use the client's primary source data over generic purchased data.

Every hospital has its own market data if it has done any international patient services or medical tourism.

1. What did medical tourism buyers buy?
2. From where did they travel?
3. Why did they choose the hospital they chose?
4. Why did they choose the doctor they chose?
5. What were their purchase objectives? (e.g., Timely treatment of diagnosis? Anonymity? Lower price? An expert of renown?, Clinical trials?)
6. Who bought?
7. How much did they buy in each specialty or service?
8. Did they purchase more on a subsequent encounter?
9. Would they buy from you again? If not, why not?

Every international patient department in every medical tourism hospital should be gathering and reporting on this valuable proprietary data. The data should be gathered from each and every patient and the data analyst in the international patient department should produce these detailed reports monthly to track market growth, return on marketing investment, and to inform competitive advantage and business intelligence for future marketing and advertising campaigns.

The report should show, by specialty and by surgeon, month-over-month (MoM) or year-over-year (YoY) trending and other indicators that are reliable because they come from primary data sources and in-house or fiduciary interpretation.

The reports should also include information about their travel arrangements, including:

1. What airline was used to travel there?
2. Which hubs they transited through to get there, if any,
3. How did they purchase their air travel tickets,
4. What they paid,
5. Which hotel they selected or were booked into by someone else, and what they paid and
6. Feedback on their accommodation.

It should also report on how they managed ground transfers, any record complaints or delight:

1. Was the car too little or just right?
2. Did they feel safe with the driver?

3. Was the car clean and in good repair?
4. Did the driver point out points of interest along the way and engage in pleasant conversation?
5. Did the driver use a cell phone for unrelated talk while driving?

The reports should also detail patient demographics:

1. Patient age
2. Patient gender
3. Primary language spoken
4. Culture and religious preference (often captured for pastoral visits and cultural awareness and sensitivity), relationship of companion travelers
5. Source market city, country
6. Socioeconomic and education levels
7. Length of stay past the hospital discharge, and
8. Any planned touristic activities.

The reports should also compile data in detail about brand awareness:

1. How they found your hospital, clinic, or doctors
2. What keywords were used to search for your services?
3. Any details about how long from first encounter of your brand to purchase decision did the sales funnel last

It should also contain information about influencer potential:

1. Will they recommend their friends, families and co-workers to your service?

There's your neat and tidy checklist. Gather this data at every episode of care and you'll have an easier time of developing successful marketing and advertising campaigns and identifying your ideal patients and target market. You'll also be able to use this meaningful data to work with facilitators, plan video and virtual reality presentations of your brand and bring depth and differentiation to your medical tourism website.

From this baseline, you'll also have the ability to compare outcomes and return on marketing investment at shows, events, congresses, and sponsorships, paid directory listings and pay-per-click website advertising. Once gathered and ready for use, it is easier to choose the right tools in your marketing mix and simply spend money without measurable return on investment. The data will be used to inform and be integrated into your content strategy and mix, your website, and your exhibitor stand strategy at events and conferences where you will hire a stand to attract and market to facilitators and referral partners, insurers, embassies, or consumers.

When you have this data, you can hire a consultant to assist you to integrate your differentiated and branded strategy for marketing, advertising, branding and promotional efforts through agencies and facilitators. This includes crafting use cases, calls to action, and measurable campaigns. Remember the old saying:

"No metrics, no marketing."

About the Author



Maria Todd specializes in health travel business strategy, market penetration and private sector and public sector advisory services and destination development.

As a healthcare management consultant, she leverages clinical, administrative, health law paralegal and health plan work experience to the benefits of her clients.

With decades of hands-on experience on strategic planning, go-to-market strategy, bundled pricing initiatives, and negotiating direct-with employer relationships, she works with hospitals, ASCs and medical groups on unique, innovative projects that boost brand recognition, positioning and drive revenues up.

She helps clients prepare for contracting with insurance plans and self-funded / self-insured employer health benefit plans through direct-deals between healthcare providers and plan administrators.

As the former CEO of Mercury Healthcare International, she recently downsized her firm to work independently as consultant to healthcare organizations. She's fearless, but seasoned when asked to implement new ideas and concepts. Now she has more time for projects that interest her and can usually make time for a quick call or a brief consultation.

Maria is the author of 20 internationally-published books on healthcare business administration covering managed care and physician employment contracting, physician-hospital-health plan integration, business development, and healthcare marketing. She's published thousands of blog articles and is frequently interviewed for industry journals, magazine & news media.

She holds 1 registered trademark, 22 copyrights, and a U.S. patent pending. She has presented 2900+ speaking engagements in 117 countries on a variety of healthcare business topics to improve revenues, quality and curtail risks. She loves teaching and shares insights, tools, tips and tactics with workshop participants.

Maria's favorite health tourism assignments focus on destination development and cultivating Centers of Excellence. She can bring value and accelerate program development and launch in any aspect of medical travel and health tourism business development.

She resides in St George, Utah with her husband and cats.

She is available to consult to healthcare organizations, self-funded employers, regulators, the media, the investor community, insurers, and pharma and medical device manufacturers. Contact her at (800) 727.4160.

CLIENT BRIEF *AskMariaTodd*TM

Do you have a short project you'd like to run past Maria Todd to request a little help? Please complete this brief questionnaire and send it to Maria@MariaTodd.com or call +1 (800) 727.4160.

NAME:

TITLE:

ORGANIZATION:

LOCATION:

EMAIL:

TELEPHONE:

I would like to discuss:

- Medical Tourism Department Development
- Medical Tourism Package Development
- Medical Tourism Marketing Strategy
- Getting New Contracts with Payers
- Source Market Targeting Strategies
- U.S. Domestic Medical Tourism Development
- International Insurance Contracting
- Help to Review International Insurance Contracts
- International Insurance Contract Readiness
- International Contract Negotiation Assistance
- International Insurance Collections
- Denied Claims Appeals
- Package Pricing Assistance
- Direct-with-Employer Contracts
- Delegated Credentialing Agreement
- Medical Tourism Facilitator Contracts
- Accreditation / Re-Accreditation Guidance
- Medical Tourism Destination Marketing and Branding
- Medical Tourism Cluster Development
- Medical Tourism Staff Training
- Other: _____

I am:

- Ready to engage your assistance
- Shopping for a consultant

This project is:

- One-time only
- Ongoing
- Intermittent, as needed

I prefer to work with you

- in-person at your location
- In-person at my location
- Remotely as much as possible

State date: _____

PLEASE NOTE:

- I do not refer patients to medical tourism facilities or practitioners.
- I work exclusively B2B client practitioners, facilities, facilitators, software designers, pharma, hospitality, airlines, travel agents, investors, insurers, employers, and government authorities and ancillary services providers.

My policy: I offer a complimentary 15-minute introductory discussion to discover how I may be able to help you. Afterward, for advice and quick consults, I charge for my time in 15-minute increments. If travel is required, I charge actual expenses and bill daily flat rates.