

MARIA K TODD

*Author*

*The Handbook of Medical Tourism Program Development*

# What is a Medical Tourism Facilitator?

**MEDICAL TOURISM MONOGRAPHS™**  
*From Maria Todd*

USA \$1.95

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Published by Maria Todd  
St George, Utah 84770

MariaTodd.com  
+1.800.727.4160

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## *Handbook of Medical Tourism Program Development*

Developing Globally Integrated Health Systems



**Maria K. Todd**

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The term, Medical Tourism Facilitator has so many facets to it, that I suggest it is time to revisit the term and perhaps refine the role and qualifications a bit better.

# A medical tourism facilitator can be many things to many people.

### **To a consumer searching for a medical tourism destination and provider, the role is:**

1. Specially-trained travel planner and logistics coordinator for travelers with very special needs
2. Destination management organizer
3. Evaluator of clinical quality and safety and hospitality provider appropriateness
4. Medical records transfer agent
5. Appointment scheduler/agenda manager
6. Paid advocate and unbiased adviser of treatment provider solutions and destination options

### **To a medical provider, the role is**

1. Free labor to do what the doctor or the hospital doesn't know how to do or have time to do, and does not want to learn or staff and fund the role internally
2. Marketing agent /sales agency who is paid only when they close sales for that provider
3. Brand promoter /referral partner who is paid only when they close sales for that provider
4. Administrative coordinator of appointments and payment transactions who is paid only when they close sales for that provider
5. Owner of another website for a back-linking or click-through strategy who is paid only when they close sales for that provider

### **To the proprietary certification bodies currently selling certification for medical tourism facilitators, the role is:**

1. Gullible consumer with a checkbook
2. Someone willing to pay them money for a quick badge of ersatz competency that can be earned in a day or two.

## How large is the addressable market?

That's been under debate since about 2007. At that time, professional publicity agents began working with hospitals in SE Asia that released figures so large that the media danced in circles believing that it had a new hot topic to write about. Deloitte published a report in 2008 authored by Dr Paul Keckley that estimated the market at one number with a bunch of zeros, and then redacted and restated those numbers a few times, but few read the revisions. McKinsey also published numbers around the same time that didn't align with the Deloitte numbers. In actuality, nobody really knows.

## Why are credible medical tourism statistics so difficult to obtain?

The reason is actually quite simple. The industry is new from a commercial activity standpoint, and there are no standardized counting methods or definitions of what is or is not a medical tourism visitor. Until some official definitions and metrics are created and adopted by the industry as a whole, we will never have statistics that are standardized by definition or auditable.

Suffice it to say that any individual, business or trade association that publishes such an industry statistic that estimates health and wellness tourism market size should be carefully assessed to determine what they have to gain by telling you the number they quote. What are they selling? Conference stands, published reports, certifications, advertising services, or something else?

## What kinds of individuals establish medical tourism facilitator businesses?

Medical tourism facilitators are an interesting group.

- Some are doctors and nurses that have no professional training in health travel planning,
- Some are travel planners without any medical industry experience other than that of having been a patient.
- Some are people that heard about this sector and found out you don't have to have any qualifications to start in health or travel as long as they have a website and a way to respond to inquiries and sell packages to consumers.
- Some are software and website developers who have no idea what is involved other than advertising and view the role as one of e-commerce. Their business model is a pay-per-click business.

## Think of a Medical Tourism Facilitator job similar to that of a new car franchise dealer.

To the manufacturer, the new car dealer (compared to a used car lot salesman) specializes in selling one brand of automobile, although there may be many models from which to choose within a brand franchise. Many facilitators choose to represent many providers instead of specializing in one type of procedure, service, destination or brand of supplier.

Too often they bring no differentiation to their own business and attempt to sell cheaper priced services than competitors. This reduces them to the epitome of commodities. The world won't miss them if and when they fail. In fact, the world will likely never know that they existed in the first place. Their office will be just like the abandoned car lot of a new car franchise dealer.

- The brand has certain established standards that the dealership must meet to remain an authorized seller of their brand's products and accessories. Otherwise, they lose their credentials to sell that

brand.

- The brand has certain established sales criteria. When the dealership exceeds these standards for sales revenue, units sold, and customer service feedback, they win awards and recognition for achieving sales and service goals.
- The key responsibilities of the sales person are to match customers to the vehicle they seek; communicate financial aspects of purchase; promote vehicles' features to prospective buyers
- The brand expects the sales person to be trained on what to say and how to explain the features and benefits of selecting the manufacturers' brands and set realistic expectations.
- The sales staff is not permitted to close the sale without supervisor oversight to check that all the regulatory paperwork, forms, payment and transactional details and explanation of safety features and other benefits have been thoroughly explained to the customer before leaving the showroom with the vehicle.

## What Are the Degree and Training Options?

If you decide to pursue a degree, associates' and bachelors' degree programs are available in healthcare or hospitality or travel management that can teach Medical Tourism Facilitators about the three primary sectors that intersect to build professional competence as a medical tourism facilitator. Typical courses cover advertising, anatomy and physiology, medical terminology, sales strategy and tactics, regulatory compliance, financial matters, service, safety, and quality warranties, budgeting and customer relations.

Additionally, certificate programs and individual courses in a number of skills that comprise the roles and responsibilities of a medical tourism facilitator that are available from some technical and community colleges that could help you prepare for a career as a medical tourism facilitator. Unfortunately, there are no college or university courses that combine the necessary intersecting skills from the three main sectors, and panel presentations and short 3-4 hour courses only touch on a single focused skill for the time available.

One would have to pay thousands of dollars to travel, book hotels and pay registrations to get enough learning opportunity at these medical tourism industry conferences because most are not focused on education or skills training, they are focused on networking, B2B meetings, and finding people to pay for add on courses and sponsorships to "get one's name" in front of other competitors with the same objectives - which translates to nothing in terms of revenue for the facilitators, and lots of money for the conference organizers.

Many of these conference organizers also prey on unsuspecting new entrants to medical tourism facilitation with certification courses that run one or two days and offer ersatz competencies signified with a fee-based license to post the logo of the certifier on the facilitator's marketing materials - which only amplifies the brand of the certifier and its ersatz competency badge.

Eventually, there will be an Institute for training where one can enroll in a training program provided by working professionals in the three integrated sectors involved in medical tourism. When that happens, there will be several different programs for medical tourism facilitator operations, including programs for prospective facilitators, special needs coordinators (transplant, dialysis, minimally-invasive surgery, large case surgery, second opinion consultations, wellness, rehabilitation, and spa/water-based tourism.

There will also be training to help a new medical tourism facilitator understand the risks involved and to

help them build a set of quality management policies, practices and procedures required to be worthy of ISO 9001:2015 certification for those seeking global recognition for their commitment to quality and safety.

# Where might a Medical Tourism Facilitator find employment?

As a medical tourism facilitator, one might work for a company or a corporation that employs many people to focus on specific parts of the role. One might also work as an employee of a hospital or clinic or at a call center that supports many hospitals and clinics within a network, health tourism cluster or a specific brand of clinic, hospital, spa, or a medical doctor's or dentist's private practice. One might also work as an independent medical tourism facilitator, case manager, destination coordinator, tour operator, or tour escort, or a specialized travel agent. Most facilitators are independent business owners that employ no other staff. In addition to competing with the providers themselves for market share, they will ultimately compete with larger corporate medical tourism businesses which are increasing in number, brand recognition, and reputation worldwide.

# What Might My Job Be Like?

Depending on what type of facilitation business one works for, one might spend days indoors in a comfortable home office or in a professional office or hospital or call center. The medical tourism facilitator is likely to spend some of the time traveling to inspect providers that they represent. Day-to-day, much of the workday is spent seated in an office area. Medical tourism facilitators are typically paid referral fees tied to the packages of medical services and hospitality arrangements that they sell. In some countries, payment for referrals to medical providers is against the law, but many are ignorant of the law and others choose to ignore it assuming they will never get caught.

While many may not have earnings goals or sales quotas to fulfill, they don't make any money if they don't sell packages which can make the job competitive, financially risky, and potentially stressful. Some make no profit whatsoever even though they make a little revenue because they are unaware of their fully-loaded costs to operate their business. Medical tourism facilitators typically work less than 40 hours per week, and they may need to work weekends or evenings in order to meet consumer needs and sales goals.

Some medical tourism facilitators enter the business because they've heard that they will be invited to take hosted trips to exotic places to familiarize themselves (fam tours) with potential destinations and medical tourism service suppliers. Frequently these fam tours are so poorly organized that in order to perform a thorough inspection beyond the fam tour meet and greet and cursory walk through, the medical tourism facilitator must return to the provider's location at their own expense at a later date to finish the quality and safety inspection at the level of depth and granularity required to be able to explain what's available to consumer prospects, leads and clients.

# How much startup capital is needed?

This all depends on the amount of training and professional assistance anticipated. Costs for a medical tourism facilitator business can include those associated with:

- training and professional development
- website development, maintenance, software and hardware
- office space and operation
- subscriptions and registration fees
- forms creation, graphics creation, brand image materials
- policies and procedures creation, implementation, testing, and required changes
- professional liability insurance
- product development and package construction
- target market research into likely buyer personas and target source markets to promote the facilitator's business for each package sold
- periodic inspection trips for situation assessments and product knowledge and destination familiarity
- onboarding of selected network providers
- costs of contracting with service providers and legal review of contract terms and conditions
- attendance at industry events

Experience teaches us that to properly onboard each new supplier, inclusive of self-paid site inspections, credentials and license verification, contract negotiation activities, legal review, policies and procedures orientation, quality management and monitoring, and adding the provider to an established website can cost as much as USD 14,000.

Most of the costs recur every two to three years. Therefore, to consider adding a new supplier to a medical tourism provider network operated by the medical tourism facilitator, one must reasonably expect to recover at least USD \$20,000 per year, per provider just to break even without covering the salary and benefits of the medical tourism facilitator. Otherwise adding that provider is simply a waste of time and money.

## Are you thinking about starting a medical tourism facilitator business?

Maria Todd is the largest and longest established medical tourism facilitator and consultant in the world. With more than 35 years of practical experience as a facilitator and business coaches to healthcare providers, investors, government authorities and facilitators, she takes pride in the results she delivers in medical tourism. If she doesn't believe she can help you, she will explain why and decline rather than take your money and lead you on with fantasies and insufficient information.

**For Aspiring Facilitators and Travel Agents:** Maria Todd offers one-on-one medical tourism facilitator training, business coaching and skills training, quality management certification preparation (ISO 9001:2015), marketing and social media skills training, branding, and provide connections to our medical tourism medical and dental clients. Find out if that's what you get with other training "seminars" before you lay out large sums of precious startup capital for spurious certifications and travel and conference



costs.

## Are you a medical doctor or dentist seeking to appoint a facilitator as your marketing agent?

**For Medical and Dental Providers, and Health Facilities:** Maria Todd leverages over 35 years of practical experience working in medical tourism marketing and business development as a consultant. She started working and consulting in medical tourism long before there was any industry association of certification program. In 2013, she decided to leave facilitation to facilitators and focused on consulting, training and writing.

Your business will benefit from the convenience and the practical and specific guidance from Maria Todd and several other vetted experts who can deliver more than 1200 years of combined professional work experience in medical tourism business development from one single contact point.

Before you can work effectively with a facilitator, look to Maria to help you develop your product, create your marketing strategy, cultivate your unique brand characteristics, and target the right source markets and personas to grow your business, your way.

Only then should you begin to discuss with facilitators about a collaborative agency relationship. When you are ready, we can connect you to qualified and competent professional medical tourism facilitators we've cultivated over the years.

Contact Maria Todd to learn more!

# 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*<sup>TM</sup>

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.