

DUAL NURSING ROLE IN MEDICAL TOURISM: A REVIEW OF BARRIERS AND IMPROVEMENT

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Abstract

Medical tourism has expanded rapidly over the past two decades and focuses on providing care internationally which creates several advantages and challenges for healthcare systems. This review examines the dual nursing role in medical tourism, highlights the barriers and strategies to improve medical and nursing tourism, and explores the importance of nursing competencies essential for medical tourism. The researcher focused on articles published between 2018 and 2025 using databases such as PubMed, Scopus, CINAHL, and Google Scholar. Findings indicated that nurses have a crucial role as care givers, educators, cultural mediators, and patient advocates within medical tourism. However, they are confronted with significant barriers including lack of training in this area, insufficient knowledge about cultural issues as well linguistic barriers, ethical and legal complexities. Strengthening nursing education, policy development, international collaboration, and organizational support are essential for improving nursing practice in medical tourism. This review underscores the importance of competencies required for nurses working in collaboration with the team involved and address challenges and improvement into journey of medical tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Medical tourism has existed since the 20th century (Tonga, Caglar & Aktan, 2021). Despite the concept of medical became being popular, many people who plan to seek medical tourism do not have enough information about which procedures they will undergo.

Health care professionals involved in medical tourism including nurses are not necessarily required to travel internationally but can be based either in the patient's home country or in the destination country where procedures are performed. Traveling to other cities can also fall under medical tourism.

Nurses are responsible for patients' general wellbeing, so they are required to extend their knowledge through nursing education to build standardized knowledge in medical tourism to provide appropriate care.

They need cultural competencies such as understanding managerial skills in dealing with patients seeking medical tourism. Also, Effective communication is one of the important competencies to manage patients and provide care across interprofessional sectors.

Another crucial role that enables nurses strengthen their global competencies is paying attention to cultural issues because of enhancing patient safety and satisfaction (Connell, 2023; Hancock; 2023 and Yıldız,2023). Nurses cannot ignore ethical issues while participating in journey of medical tourism in a global context.

Dual Role for Nurse in medical tourism

Nurses are essential to the delivery of care in medical tourism, yet their role remains underexplored in comparison to physicians and healthcare institutions. As frontline providers, nurses significantly influence patient satisfaction, safety, and overall outcomes (Alvincent, 2024; Alvincent,2025). A valuable step is establishing a program to train nurses who are interested in medical tourism and encourage them to attend conferences, providing guidance about centers that work directly in medical tourism. The role of the nurse is to help patients find suitable countries to receive appropriate care and orient patients about the potential hazards that may occur. So, qualifications are important and should cover advanced clinical skills, communication skills, managerial skills, cultural background and motivation to learn.

Cross-cultural interactions and ethical considerations influence patient experiences and outcomes (Hanefeld et al., 2020). Patients' cultural backgrounds influence their expectations of care, pain expression, decision-making, and family involvement. Nurses must adapt care plans to align with these beliefs (Purnell, 2021). Culturally competent care promotes dignity, respect, and ethical practice. It reduces biases and enhances the therapeutic relationship between nurses and patients (Jeffreys, 2020). Patients' cultural backgrounds influence their expectations of care, pain expression, decision-making, and family involvement. Nurses must adapt care plans to align with these beliefs (Purnell, 2021). Also, traveling for medical care can be stressful. Nurses who provide culturally sensitive support help reduce anxiety and promote physical as well emotional well-being.

Nurses should have strong knowledge in each type of medical tourism product for example, in cosmetic surgery tourism, motivations range from marketing influence on the quality of post-operative care provided by nurses in the destination country (Robertson, Moorman & Korus, 2022). Medical tourists travel to undergo executive health evaluations, ophthalmologic care, and oral surgery, joint resurfacing or replacement, cardiac surgery, organ and stem cell transplantation, gender reassignment surgery, and in-vitro fertilization. As regards patients' safety, medical tourism raises concerns about continuity of care, postoperative complications, and regulatory oversight. Reviewing current research helps identify gaps in safety protocols and opportunities for standardization (Johnston et al., 2021). This enhances patient trust and satisfaction that is reflected in supporting accreditation and quality standards as well as overcoming the barriers during journey of medical tourism.

Barriers in Nursing and Medical Tourism

Legal issues such as ethical dilemmas related to standards of care, documentation, patient rights, and legal accountability across jurisdictions (Cesario, 2018). Another barrier includes language differences and cultural misunderstandings may affect the communication process, affect informed consent, and compromise patient safety (Camargo-Plazas et al., 2020).

Lack of specialized training in medical tourism as nurses receive limited formal education, international healthcare law, or cross-cultural nursing (Alvincent, 2024). Nursing

shortages and heavy workloads worldwide have increased reliance on internationally mobile nurses. So, policymakers should address workforce distribution, ethical recruitment, and professional development. The high expectations of medical tourists, combined with tight schedules and hospitality like service demands, increase nurse's workload and emotional strain (Ebrahimian et al., 2019). Post discharge follows up after patients return home remains a challenge, increasing the risk of complications and fragmented care (CDC, 2025).

Improvement of medical tourism:

Establish programs for medical tourism

Incorporating medical tourism, global health, and cultural competency into nursing curricula and continuing education programs is essential (Alvincent, 2025). Establishment of postgraduate diploma and master's program concerned with medical and nursing tourism.

Develop standardized protocols and guidelines

Hospitals should recognize the expanded role of nurses in medical tourism and ensure adequate staffing, legal protection, and professional recognition (Cesario, 2018). International nursing organizations should collaborate to establish ethical, legal, and professional guidelines for nursing practice in medical tourism (Camargo-Plazas et al., 2020). Important elements should be covered by institutions to provide language support services, intercultural training, and culturally sensitive care models. Enhance international cross border collaboration between healthcare providers can improve continuity of care and patient safety post travel (CDC, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Nurses as health care professionals have a pivotal role in medical tourism, and they need to be involved in addressing barriers and establish strategies for improvement in this field. It is expected that medical tourism will provide a new dual role for nurses as the healthcare trend expands around the world.

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