

The healthcare export and the potential of health tourism in Turkey

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Keywords

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Abstract

The health tourism that has risen and diversified rapidly worldwide has caught an upward trend and begun to come into prominence as an alternate tourism sector. Benefiting the cheap and qualified healthcare and enjoying a holiday during the treatment attracts the interest towards this sector. That the incomes in the healthcare tourism get over those in the tourism and that extra activities such as transportation, accomodation and city tours are allowed supply advantages in terms of the state economies. In this study, the relative development degree of the healthcare sector in Turkey gets compared with those in the OECD member countries and also handled the condition of the healthcare tourism in Turkey as an important income resource. In this research, the health indicators of Turkey was compared with the member countries of OECD through evaluating between the last decade of 2000 and 2010 years and thus the potential of Turkey in terms of tourism sector was put forward.

1.Introduction

The health tourism that has risen and diversified rapidly worldwide has caught an upward trend and begun to come into prominence as an alternate tourism sector. Benefiting the cheap and qualified healthcare and enjoying a holiday during the treatment attracts the interest towards this sector. That the incomes in the healthcare tourism get over those in the tourism and that extra activities such as transportation, accomodation and city tours are allowed supply advantages in terms of the state economies.

The healthcare sector in Turkey has developed massively in recent decades. Above all, the discriminative enforcements of classism such as treatment of officials and workers in different hospitals were eliminated. The hospitals serving only for officials and those serving only for workers were transferred to the Ministry of Health through combining the healthcare services under one single roof and thus were provided each citizen to be able to receive treatment any hospital they liked.

Besides, citizens were supplied to benefit not only from state hospitals but also private hospitals. Family doctor service pertained to citizens started. %18 VAT (Value Added Tax) rate in healthcare services was decreased to %8. The poor citizens who could not afford the health expenses were provided greencards and so they were able to receive both inpatient and outpatient treatment with the coverage of whatever medicine they need being procured by the government.

Although the share of the total healthcare expenses within the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and the healthcare expense per capite remain beneath the OECD average, still the healthcare exclusion from our country towards the world have reached up to significant degrees. The healthcare reforms, modernization works, high institutionalisation rates, rising public and private sector investments realized by government provide the ascension of benefiting the healthcare services and the qualification of those works. Besides, in the progress of the healthcare services might be observed the effect of the adaptation ability to technology, macro economic stabilization and the competition among the associations.

Turkey has gained the attraction of the healthcare sector in terms of both situation and current substructure in its geography. The healthcare services provided in the country stand out as cheap and qualified alternatives. With its numerous hospitals serving in EU standards, thermal resources, touristic accommodation capacity, price advantages, appropriate climate, Turkey has hold a competitive

superiority and become an attraction for the patients coming from abroad. The healthcare tourism is directly related to the tourism, the healthcare services and the accessibility.

In this study, the relative development degree of the healthcare sector in Turkey gets compared with those in the OECD member countries and also handled the condition of the healthcare tourism in Turkey as an important income resource. In this research, the health indicators of Turkey was compared with the member countries of OECD through evaluating the datum between the last decade of 2000 and 2010 years and thus the potential of Turkey in terms of tourism sector was put forward.

2.The benefits of health tourism to countries

According to the World health Organization, (WHO) the concept of health can be defined as a state of body, psychological and social well being of an individual. Health expenditures have to be considered in the state government expenditures or the expenditures of the private sector. (Bayraktutan Y. & Pehlivan F., 2012). According to the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (AIEST) tourism is defined as the temporal movement of foreigners and/or the movement of an individual from one place to another as a condition of not engaging in a continuous money earning activity. (Getz D., 2008).

Tourism can be categorised into educational, sport, cultural, religion, entertainment, relaxation, history and health. Health tourism can be explained as the relaxation and healthy rest of an individual. (Connel J., 2006; Ozer & Songur, 2012).

As a means of developing this kind of tourism these most important factors can be identified; cheap health expenditures, an advancement of the countries the health technology, low transportation expenditures and internet marketing. (Kilic & Kurnaz, 2010). If we categorise the benefits of health tourism, we can group them into four categories: patients, hospitals, insurance companies and all health system. (Gulen & Demirci, 2012).

In order to ensure high quality health care provision health tourism can benefit hospitals in the field of application of health technologies, experimentation as well as improving appliances used in various hospitals. For insurance companies, in order to increase customer satisfaction and reduce waiting list for customers health tourism can provide an additional service.

The benefits of health tourism to countries can be grouped under two headings namely, physical benefits and non-physical benefits. (Altin U & Bektas G. & Antep Z., 2012).

The physical benefits of health tourism:

- In the field of health, both foreign patients as well as local patients of a country are given better health services.
- Health tourism also increases the sharing of information concerning health matters between countries.
- The income generated from tourism can also be realised throughout the year.
- The countries can earn foreign currency because of the visit of foreign tourists to their countries.
- It can increase the transfer of information and technology between various countries in matters of health.
- With regard to health tourism, the undeveloping countries have less expenditures if we compare it with the developed countries. This can be an advantage for undeveloped countries.
- There can be strategic partnership with other countries and hospitals in matters of health.
- There can be global marketing and medical trade with each other.
- There can be an increase in employment

The non-physical benefits of health tourism:

- The countries can earn international recognition in the area of global marketing.
- The patient can become more satisfied with given health services.
- In matters of health it also ensures public and private sector partnership.
- Health tourism can benefit the sharing of international social and cultural experience.
- For countries, in terms of health health tourism can be a comparative advantage.
- It can increase the coordination between the hospitals.
- The health tourism can be of benefit to international relations.

- Health tourism can result in a worldwide image in the global marketing area between countries in the provision of health care services

3. Health Tourism in the World and its Development

The health tourism has emerged as a result of the health care increase and decrease problems as well as patients consciousness resulting from the process of globalization in the world. (WTO Agreements & Public Health, 2002). Generally health tourism can be explained as both holiday and health care. There is both positive and negative effect between health and tourism. The positive effect is that tourist travel for health purposes. The negative effect is that the tourists can be sick and that can be harmful. For example, China, Hong Kong, Singapore lost 20 billion dollars as a result of SARS disease. And, in Asia, because of Avian Flu 12 million people did not go to Asian countries. (Icoz O. 2009). Therefore, Swin Flu is a very dangerous issue for international tourism.

If we take a look at the research about health tourism, there was a rapid increase after 2000 and has become a very important marketing area. For health purpose in 2005, twenty billion dollars was spent by the travels made by 19 million people in the world. It can be calculated that about 40 billion dollars will be spent in the health tourism until 2012. (Acar M & Demirbas D. & Gedik İ. & Ilter K, 2012).

And, if we look at the tourism income in the world it can be seen that of the continents Europe came first followed by Amerika, Asia and Africa. Countries that have tourism potential has increased employment, income, reduced debt, have good balance of payment position and as a result living standard of people have been increased. (Gulen. & Demirci 2012). Countries that have tourism potential has increased employment, income, reduced debt, have good balance of payment position and as a result living standard of people have been increased.

Countries that received the greatest number of tourists (2009) in the world are shown below:

The number of foreign Tourists (Million) first 10 countries.

1	FRANCE	74,2
2	USA	54,9
3	SPAIN	52,2
4	CHINA	50,9
5	ITALY	43,2
6	UK	28,0
7	TURKEY	25,5
8	GERMANY	24,9
9	MALAYSIA	22,1
10	MEXICO	21,5

World Tourism Organization Report (UNWTO).

A research about the health tourism revealed that health tourism increased rapidly after 2000 and it has become a big market area. According to the World Tourism Organization, the health tourism is increased by 100 billion dollars in 2012. Again, According to the World Tourism Organization, It is calculated that only in the USA, 23 million people potential patients will spend 79.5 billion dollars until 2017. (Acar M & Demirbas D. & Gedik I. & Ilter K, 2012).

The countries that send the most tourist and the reason for sending tourist are as follow: (Acar M & Demirbas D. & Gedik I. & Ilter K, 2012).

- Undeveloped countries (Sudan, Somalia, Afganistan, Libya etc.)

The main reason: There is less health services and less personnels.

- Asia countries (Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, etc.)

The main reason: There is less health services and less personnels.

- USA, Europe

The main reason: The expensive health services and the long waiting time for patients.

- The countries that have a lot of old people.

The main reason: There is a lot of old people, insufficient personnels and expensive health care.

4. Health Tourism in Turkey and its Development

In the last decade, Turkey has become one of the seven biggest tourist countries in the world. According to the tourist ranking, Turkey has increased from being ranked 17th in 2002 to 7th in 2009 in the world. In 2008, while the number of tourist who visited Turkey from all over the world was 26.3 million, in 2011 about 31.4 billion tourists visited Turkey. (Barca M. & Akdeve E. & Balay G., 2012). The above mentioned figure does not include small hospitals and tooth patients that is approximately 100.000 tourist patients.

As it can be seen from below, Turkey together with other European countries have undertaken health tourism at advanced levels. Beginning with Germany, health tourists from countries such as Holland, France and Australia have also visited Turkey. The countries, that sent most health tourists to Turkey can be seen in the table below. (Aktepe C., 2013).

The countries, that sent most health tourists to Turkey can be seen in the table below.

Germany	% 36
Holland	% 8
Australia	% 5
CYPRUS	% 5
Russia	% 4
Iraq	% 4
France	% 3

A break down of the number of tourists that come from foreign countries to Turkey for the purposes of receiving healthcare services reveals the following traits: (Aydin D.&Aypek N.&Aktepe C.& Sahbaz R.P.& Arslan S, 2011).

- Countries with a relatively large number of Turkish population such as Germany, Holland and France.
- Developing countries with inadequate health infrastructure and physicians which adversely affects healthcare provision such as the Balkan countries and the turkish countries in Central Asia.
- Countries with expensive healthcare services and require patients to be covered by insurance services such as the USA, UK and Germany.
- Countries with long patient waiting list resulting from inequalities in the demand and supply of healthcare services such as the UK, Holland and Canada.
- Countries with bilateral agreements with Turkey in the field of health which makes it possible for a specified number of patients to be given free healthcare services such Afghanistan, Yemen and Sudan.

However with the legal regulations in November 2011 with regards to works as well business associated with health tourism inter-agency coordination tasks between the Ministry of Health were entered. At the Ministry of Health a department named "Health Tourism Department" which is directed at developing innovations for health tourism was established at the national level to plan, monitor and standardize health tourism. In the same way, in the Turkey Tourism Strategy 2023 Draft Report prepared by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the issue of health tourism was identified as one of the priority areas.

Moreover, the legal regulations made in 2012 brought about a 50% tax exemption on incomes realised from Health Tourism. Annually an amount of 300,000 US dollars financial support is given in order to promote health institutions abroad. In addition to this, there has been research in the field of tourism, reporting, advertisement on the internet and also providing financial support towards the flight tickets of health tourists who come to our country for the puposes of treatment. (Barca M. & Akdeve E. & Balay G., 2012).

Today, in Turkey with regard to the area of international hospital accreditation what is seen as the most important of the 5 types of accreditation system in the world the Joint Commission International (JCI) accredited 47 health institutions can be found. This figure, on a world scale and of the high number of accredited hospitals all over the world correspond to approximately 10%. Compared to Turkey, India has 16, Thailand has 11, Singapore has 16, Brazil has 23 and Saudi Arabia has 33 Joint Commission International (JCI) accredited hospitals. (Barca M. & Akdeve E. & Balay G., 2012).

The Ministry of Health's web based 'Foreign Patient Tracking System' has been created to receive feedback from hospitals in 81 states. In Turkey, with respect to increasing the mobility of medical tourism an increase in the number of private hospitals that provide standard and quality services plays an important role. In the year 2008 while 24% of foreigners who received health care services were treated in public hospitals, 76% preferred private hospitals. For the year 2009 while 77% of foreign patients were treated in private hospitals, the remaining 23% were treated in state hospitals. In the year 2010, the proportion of foreign patients treated in public hospitals increased by 30% as a result of an increase in the number of personnel and the quality of services provided by public hospitals.

In the year 2011 although, 73% of patients were treated in private hospitals and 27% of patients were treated in public hospitals. Generally, with the effects of the legal regulations made in the area of health tourism, coupled with an increase in the number of private hospitals as well as an increase in the personnel and quality of services provided by public hospitals between 2008 and 2011 the number of health tourist who received treatment from public and private hospitals increased by approximately 52%. Since the year 2011 a total of 156, 176 tourists were treated in Turkey. 62% of these individuals travelled for purposes other treatment but as a result of the discomforts experienced during the period of travel had to be treated. The remaining 38% travelled to Turkey for the puposes of receiving healthcare services. Of the 59,473 health tourists while only 9% preferred public hospitals, the remaining 91% which represents a significant proportion of the number of health tourists tend to prefer private hospitals.

The health situation of tourists is slightly different when we look at the number of patients. Of the tourists who came to Turkey for purposes other than receiving treatment but had some discomfort, 38% preferred public hospitals and 62% preferred private hospitals.(Barca M. & Akdeve E. & Balay G., 2013).

5. Conclusion

The Health Transformation Project despite all the shortcomings and restructuring process brought breakthrough and innovation in Turkey that all the health sectors have a realistic pink colour and also provides up to 75% patient satisfaction price/benefit ratio which provides a unique example to the whole world.

Turkey has unique features capable of attracting tourists who travel for health purposes as well as companies involved in the marketing of health tourism. Of these unique characteristics include reliability in the health sector, professional quality service, high medical technology, comfortable environment and also the geographical location of Turkey which provides for convenience of transportation from Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Middle East and North Africa.

In spite of these unique features, Turkey like any other country has some disadvantages with regard to promoting health tourism. The most important of these disadvantages is insufficient supply existing in the health sector. That is there exist a maximum limit on the number of patients that can be accepted. Nowadays, people use the health sector quite often as much as has never being used before. On the average every Turkish citizen visits the hospital 7 times in a year for a medical check up. This according to the world standard is a high number. For this a number of causes can be sited. Among these causes include the easy access to the health sector to enjoy health care services, 2.3 digit performance system in the health sector and at the same time an increase in the demad for healthcare services, the demand for health care services for many years have been distressing and this demand can be likened to a psychological hunger for health care services. Together these factorst results in a delay in the education of workers in the health sectors especially doctors regarding employee rights and the services they provide.

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