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## Medical Tourism: Informed Decisions Hard for International Patients



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International patients may not obtain full information needed in order to make informed decisions about care abroad.

An article published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* said that while tourists traditionally leave high-income countries seeking lower-cost healthcare in middle and low-income nations now more patients are travelling to the U.S. for treatment.

The article was produced by the Texas A&M Health Science Centre School of Public Health under Yan Alicia Hong, Ph.D., an associate professor there.

She explained that the opening of a Chinese American Physicians E-hospital in Texas led her to study the situation. Physicians at the centre are bilingual Chinese-American doctors. They provide initial tele-consulting services then help with international transfer and treatment in the U.S.

"I realised that the flourishing telemedicine and medical tourism communities have been understudied and need more attention," Hong said in the announcement about the study.

Hong said that there were four areas that needed immediate attention for improvement in patient care.

- More reliable information is needed for the assessment of healthcare quality across borders. This includes information comparing price to outcome.
- Communication with patients about the potential risks of medical tourism is insufficient.
- Policies related to ethical concerns related to clinical trials are inadequate.
- Legal concerns for medical tourists need to be addressed.

Hong found that number of Chinese patients seeking healthcare in the U.S. has gone up by 400 percent in the decade between 2004 and 2014, and more than 70 percent of these patients seek oncology care. Patients typically spend \$100,000 to \$150,000 for their medical trip and pay for their treatment with cash up-front.

In response, some hospitals are increasing the visibility of their services to international patients while a growing number are creating departments specifically to manage medical tourism.

"Such development has enabled patients around the world to seek the best care available and facilitates efficient communication of medicine globally," Hong said. "However, it's imperative that more research and dialogue be conducted on the issues and impact associated with the evolving models of medical consumerism."

Source: [Vital Record](#)

Image Credit: Bioethics

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