Chapter 11
Digital Health Innovation Enhancing Patient Experience in Medical Travel

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ABSTRACT

Digital health technological innovations are disrupting every sector of the economy, including medical travel/tourism. Global patients as medical tourists are using patient-centric digital health technologies, enhancing patient/medical tourists experience and making it more transparent and engaging with health-care providers and medical tourists. Digital communication tools such as e-mail, online appointments, smartphones, instant messaging applications, social media tools, user-generated content by online patient communities, tele-medicine, tele-radiology, my-Health records, Skype consultation, WhatsApp, health video, electronic health records, health data analytics tools, and artificial intelligence-enabled health technologies enhance the medical travel decision-making process, reduce cost, improve patient care and transparency of communication, and engage the relationship between the patient and the healthcare provider with positive outcomes, medical tourist experience, and empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Medical travel/tourism (MTm) is a process where people travel within the country or overseas for medical treatment/surgery. Medical travel can be treatment-driven or destination-driven, based on patient's need for treatment, health service quality of the hospital, less waiting time, national and international accreditation, diagnostic expertise, super-surgical speciality and surgeon's reputation (Medhekar, 2014). As determined from the MTm Association site, some of the popular destination-driven treatments are dental (Thailand, India, Mexico and Poland), cosmetic (Thailand, Argentina and Mexico), hair transplant (Turkey), bariatric (Thailand, India and Mexico), sex-realignment (Thailand) and surrogacy/fertility (In-

dia and Thailand). Treatment-driven are cosmetic, dental, eye surgery, heart, hip and knee replacement, organ transplant, oncology/cancer, reproductive treatment and stem cell therapy.

According to Shaw et al. (2018) digital health innovation has three goals of reducing costs, enhancing patient experience, and improve healthcare outcomes. Thus, digital innovation in health technologies and its adoption in MTm related services are enhancing medical tourist (MTs) experience and making it more patient-centric, transparent and engaging. Digital communication tools using web 2.0 technologies, e-Health-2.0, and Medicine-2.0, are: e-mail, on-line appointments, smart-phones, instant messaging application, social media tools, user-generated content by online patient communities, tele-medicine, Skype, WhatsApp, messenger, health video, electronic health-records, health-data analytics tools and Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled technologies (Fisher & Clayton, 2012; Lupton, 2014; Shaw et al., 2018; Thackeray et al., 2008). The use of innovative digital health technologies, e-health records, health-data analytics, improves transparency of communication in real time, enhances medical travel decision making process, improves patient-centered personalised care and relationship between the patient as MTs and medical professionals, with positive MTs engagement, empowerment and experience.

Hospitals and diagnostic clinics involved in treating foreign patients' need to have an online profile to increase market share and communicate information to attract potential foreign patients, receive enquires and book them as actual patients for treatment, via their online medical consultant. Medical consultant establishes direct contact and communicates with the patients to personalise their healthcare needs and provide holistic healthcare solutions as per treatment requirements (McKinsey & Company, 2013). Online digital health technological tools facilitate communication and engagement between the patient/MTs, doctor/healthcare provider and medical-tour facilitators in a timely manner. It helps to communicate information in real-time and engages and empowers the patient to make informed decision regarding their medical travel plans and enhances patient experience and outcomes.

Medical tourism hospitals and popular MTm destinations in developing countries, such as Thailand, India, Dubai, Singapore, Malaysia and Mexico are increasingly adopting innovative patient-centric digital health/e-health technological tools to engage with foreign patients, improve healthcare practices for clinicians/medical professionals, and provide positive MTm experience. It has been a challenge for MTm hospitals as well as patients/MTs to accept, embrace and adopt digital technologies and manage their medical travel journey (Medhekar, 2017). The main aim of embracing digital technologies in MTm is to provide timely access to world class Joint Commission International (JCI) accredited, quality of medical treatment, in state-of-the-art hospitals facilities and positive MTm experience to the MTs, so they can choose the hospital, surgeon's super-speciality and the destination for their medical surgery and improve their physical health and quality of life (Medhekar, Wong & Hall, 2014, 2019).

Digital revolution is disrupting every sector of the economy including healthcare and tourism. Digital revolution is driven by innovators of healthcare technologies, start-up firm, investors/entrepreneurs, medical professionals, healthcare providers and government policy makers to bring about a change in healthcare ecosystems. A human and a patient/MTs centred approach to digital health will enhance patient experience and empower them to make right choices and decision to travel abroad for medical treatment/surgery. MTm hospitals and healthcare providers treating foreign patients need to engage with digital technologies to attract, communicate, maintain transparency and retain foreign MTs for repeat visits with positive healthcare and MTm experience. Medical technologies include a wide range of products and services to treat medical conditions and diseases, for example, medical devises, innovative healthcare services, digital health records tools, social-media tools and smart-phone applications, healthcare

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