


Chapter 36

The Effects of COVID-19 on Health Tourism and Tourist Health

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ABSTRACT

The high epidemic rate of COVID-19, its impact on the shrinkage in the world economy, and changes in the daily routines of people show that it is not only a problem that concerns public health, but also a major concern which coerces people (and countries) all over the world to rethink in the name of sustainability of contemporary lifestyles and to work on systemic changes. Undoubtedly, health tourism is one of these subjects. In this chapter, the authors present an overview of COVID-19's effects on health tourism and tourist health.

INTRODUCTION

After the reporting of the first case in Wuhan, China, to the World Health Organization (WHO) in December 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic caused millions of deaths with the international circulation of travel and commercial exchange around the world (WHO, 2021). As of 2021, each country continues to take precautions by its own conditions, both with the recommendations of the World Health Organization and the work of scientists. These measures include but not limited to; closing borders, partial travel restrictions, entry and exit screening, quarantine of passengers (Burns et al., 2020). Necessary precautions for holding down the outbreak conducted to radical social and economic decisions such as closing international borders and / or restricting border crossings, limiting social activities and even prohibiting intercity travel around the world and activities in many business lines came to a halt. Tourism is one of

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the economic activities most affected by the pandemic situation. On the other hand, tourism mobility is also an important factor in the spread of infectious diseases.

Regarding the situation from this perspective, it is clear that health and tourism are related. There are two different consequences of this relation; health tourism and tourist health. In broad terms, health tourism is defined as the traveling of people to different locations to receive health services (Ross, 2001). Traveling with the aim of health brings along the international currency flow. Thus, health tourism and related activities induce an inflow of foreign currency to companies of both the health and tourism sectors. The other concept introduced by the relation of health and tourism is tourists' health. All the activities regarding the health of the tourist, including the preventive measures against diseases and conservation of the current health status of the tourists, may introduce negative effects on the whole tourism sector, especially during outbreaks. One of the most important examples of this situation in the pre-COVID-19 era is the SARS outbreak of far east Asia in 2002. The announcement of international data of locations affected by epidemics suddenly paused tourism mobility to these destinations. The high epidemic rate of COVID-19, its impact on the shrinkage in the world economy and changes in the daily routines of people show that it is not only a problem that concerns public health, but also a major concern which coerces people (and countries) all over the world to rethink in the name of sustainability of contemporary lifestyles and to work on systemic changes.

BACKGROUND

Health Tourism and Medical Tourism Concepts

It wouldn't be right to consider health and tourism and their relation as relatively new concepts. Indeed, history is full of evidence of traveling for medical purposes; especially in the Roman Empire and Ancient Egypt, (Rabotic, 2014), Asclepieia, a famous healing center in Ancient Greece (Christopoulou-Aletra et al., 2010). In modern societies, the concept of medical tourism means cross-border travels of individuals who seek treatment for any reason (Carrera and Lunt, 2010). Although the concept of medical tourism is named 'medical travel', 'international health trade' and the concept of medical tourist as 'international patient' in the literature, all of these activities include tourism products such as accommodation, eating and drinking. So, the definitions of 'medical tourism' and 'medical tourists' are more appropriate for these activities and the participants. However, there are rare cases where medical tourism movements can be qualified as international medical trade. This issue is closely related to the consummation of touristic products, its frequency and the traveled distance. With a general interpretation, it can be said that the events take place within the international service cycle and therefore these travels can be included in the scope of medical tourism (Connell, 2013).

Most of the literature on medical tourism assumes that medical tourists intend to travel abroad to seek medical treatment (Connell, 2013). Cohen proposed a five-category typology to explain the extent of the medical treatment in travel motivations and travel (Cohen, 2008);

- The first category; "mere tourist", is defined as a person who does not benefit from medical services in the host country during the period of travel.
- The second category; "Medicated tourists" include people who receive medical treatment in case of an accident or health problem during a holiday.

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