


# Chapter 16


## Ethical Marketing Practices and Challenges in Medical Tourism

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### ABSTRACT

*Medical tourism has emerged as a significant global phenomenon, driven by rising healthcare costs, long waiting times, and the pursuit of advanced yet affordable treatments abroad. While marketing is indispensable in positioning destinations and providers, it simultaneously generates complex ethical challenges. Promotional strategies often exaggerate success rates, obscure potential risks and underrepresent*

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*post-treatment responsibilities, thereby creating asymmetries of information and undermining informed consent. Healthcare commodification and digital intermediaries prioritize revenue over patient welfare, heightening risks of misinformation, privacy breaches and weak accountability. Ethical marketing in this context is not merely a normative obligation but a strategic necessity for fostering trust, credibility and sustainability. This chapter explores ethical dilemmas in medical tourism marketing and proposes a framework to align promotion with integrity, equity and sustainability.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, medical tourism has blossomed, drawing patients from all corners of the globe to explore treatment options beyond their home countries (Kim & Seo, 2023). Many people leave their home countries in need of better healthcare alternatives because they are faced with exorbitant charges, long waiting times, or a lack of access to sophisticated medical treatments (Choo, 2025). New opportunities for hospitals and healthcare providers to reach audiences throughout the world have emerged with the influx of patients, but complex new hurdles have also emerged.

In this landscape, marketing has emerged as a vital instrument. Hospitals and clinics share their services through websites, social media, and advertisements, striving to foster trust and draw in patients (Garad et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the consequences are substantial. Healthcare is not solely concerned with products; it is also concerned with the well-being of individuals (Misselbrook, 2024). Serious consequences may result from misleading claims or ambiguous information. In order to protect patients' safety and trust, ethical marketing is essential for empowering them to make knowledgeable decisions.

In the world of healthcare, some providers shine a light on honesty, transparency, and the rights of patients, while others find themselves navigating the tricky waters of business ambitions alongside their ethical duties (Sharma & Bhatia, 2014). The variations in practice underscore the importance of thoroughly examining ethical marketing within the realm of medical tourism. Grasping the way providers connect, the hurdles they encounter, and the paths they can take to enhance their communication can foster a more accountable healthcare atmosphere.

### **1.1. Conceptual Foundations of Ethical Marketing**

Ethical marketing involves the genuine promotion of products or services, characterised by honesty, fairness, and a deep respect for consumer rights. In the realm of healthcare, particularly within the context of medical tourism, these principles

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