

Chapter 14

Redefining Medical Tourism

Desai Narasimhalu

Singapore Management University, Singapore

ABSTRACT

Dr. Wei Siang Yu, a medical doctor who is a compulsive serial entrepreneur and the founder of the FlyFreeForHealth, has created a comprehensive medical tourism service using a multimedia platform as the core engine. FlyFreeForHealth has started gaining traction in several countries across Asia including the Philippines and Australia. Dr. Wei has been very resourceful in exploiting business opportunities by leveraging emerging technologies for his company's products. The rapid growth of the company requires Dr. Wei to focus on developing an enterprise related information and technology architecture for FlyFreeForHealth.

BACKGROUND

FlyFreeForHealth (FFFH) is a company that has been built using multimedia technology for the medical tourism industry. Medical tourism is a term coined by tour agencies to facilitate travel across international borders to get either affordable or specialized healthcare. This specialized area of tourism is the focus of FFFH technology innovation, as presented in this case study.

Medical Tourism

Medical tourism is fast becoming a national industry in a number of countries. This reflects international popularity of medical tourism; as also, the potential for large market growth over the next decade. Recently, countries have begun to establish a medical tourism component as part of their national tourism board or equivalent agencies.

Medical tourists come from every part of the world including first world countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany,

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and other European nations. Some medical tourists travel to countries that offer healthcare services that are very specialized and fill a particular health or lifestyle niche. They may travel to other countries to undergo procedures that are banned in their own country. Other medical tourists choose to get elective procedures outside their countries because of the affordable prices in the destination countries. In addition, medical tourists may choose to travel to other countries to get required medical procedures where there would otherwise be a long delay in their home country due to service capacity limitations.

Challenges in the Medical Tourism Industry

The availability of medical tourism services generally spreads through word of mouth. As such, the industry is difficult to regulate in terms of quality control measures put in place to protect the consumer. Though unknown at this time, there is the possibility that some international service providers may offer less than desirable quality of service. Quality control, from an industry perspective, remains a challenge.

The actual cost of medical services of an international medical provider may differ significantly from anticipated costs. Unknown to the consumer, there may be hidden costs that are not communicated until after services are provided. While the cost of a procedure might be clearly articulated, the service provider might be silent on related costs.

Some of the elective procedures do not need the presence of accompanying friends and family to spend significant time with the patient. These companions would often want to spend time engaged in touristy activities such as shopping, sightseeing, entertainment, dining and other lifestyle services. However, even those hospitals offering good one stop health care and lifestyle services are not mandated to provide tourist-related services.

Some budget-conscious tourists would want to compare and contrast the costs and benefits of using service providers in various countries. Given that the industry is very fragmented, they do not have any help in determining the best service option in staying within their budget. Some tourists, with limited resources, might be traveling to a different country because of the non-availability of a procedure in their own country. For these tourists, the cost of air travel and international accommodations could be daunting when taking into account financial constraints.

These are some of the challenges faced in the medical tourism industry. FlyFreeForHealth entered the market to address as many of these challenges as possible.

FLY FREE FOR HEALTH

FFFH was the vision of its founder Dr. Wei who wanted to build the world's first comprehensive Business-to-Customer and Business-to-Business medical tourism hub providing a one-stop destination for health, travel, leisure and lifestyle services to the consumer, using multimedia technologies as the platform.

Dr. Wei is a medical inventor and entrepreneur. He is internationally known for his innovations in technology. He is known for his vision in expanding healthcare services in an international marketplace of medical tourism. Dr. Wei's background is presented in Exhibit 1, which is central to the current and future success of FlyFreeForHealth.

FFFH was built on the observation that today's technology savvy and mobile consumers are no longer focused on domestic health professionals as the only source for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of conditions and diseases. Thanks to Internet-based information resources, such as WebMD.com, MayoClinic.org, NIH.gov, and others, consumers are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about preventive medicine, aesthetic enhancements, and lifestyle management.

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