

STRATEGIC MARKETING & COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS OF MALAYSIAN MEDICAL TOURISM INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Medical Tourism is one of the kind and biggest industries in the world, and it plays an important role in the world economy at macro level. Medical Tourism industry is supporting the national growth when the foreign exchange is inflows as an added engine for social transformation which produced a favorable image on the global platform. Previously, patients from the east were travelling to the west to get the best medical treatment. Nowadays, patients from west and developed countries, travel to east and developing countries which provided reasonable as well as better medical services, equipped with most advanced medical technologies in health care treatments. This paper is a strategic and competitive analysis of Malaysian medical tourism industry which has identified poor or no follow-up care for medical patients. After the patients being hospitalized for a short while, then, while waiting for returning flight home, they will travel within that country. Also discuss the weak malpractice law; patients suffer and have limited ability to complain about poor medical care services. In addition, Malaysian tourism industry is the ambassador to other sub industries. On the other hand, medical tourism also affects the host countries with the problem of internal brain drain, whereby all good doctors give up serving the public sector and go into the exotic, private health centers, which serve the medical tourists with lucrative salary and benefits. Medical tourism started to be given prominence by the Malaysian government after Asian Financial crisis as an economic diversification. Thus, Malaysian Ministry of Health had set up Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) to promote and develop the country's health tourism industry rigorously and position Malaysia as a healthcare ASEAN's region hub. Therefore, this paper will highlight some of the key strategies and competitive elements needed to be improved in the medical tourism industry as compare to other regional competitors such as Singapore and Thailand.

Keywords: Medical tourism industry, competitive analysis, government strategies, medical tourism strategies.

I-INTRODUCTION

Medical Tourism is one of the biggest industries in the world, and it plays an important role in the world economy at macro level. Medical Tourism industry is supporting the national growth when the foreign exchange is inflows. Basically Medical Tourism is a kind of industry, which is cure to macroeconomic problems, as an added engine for social transformation and to produce a favorable image on the global platform. It is a generous incentive to the industry. This has attracts many entrepreneurs to invest in medical tourism without necessarily considering internal and external factors affecting the tourism sector. In fact globally medical tourists are looking for ways to obtain access to affordable health care. (Ramirez de Arellano, 2007).

Malaysia's healthcare industry is estimated at a value of around US\$10.3 billion in 2010. In the same year approximately 4.4% of GDP is dedicated to the health care sector. Previously, Malaysian healthcare tourism grows at a rate of 25.3 per cent a year since 1998. This signifies a more advanced medical care services in Malaysia (Brandt & Lim, 2012). Some 400,000 foreigners were healthcare tourists in Malaysia for 2010, generating revenue of US\$ 101.65 million (RM306.98 million) for the country. The figure is expected to increase to US\$ 116.5 million (RM351.83) until the end of 2011. Malaysia now receives 85–90% of its patients from ASEAN countries and the rest of 10–15% from Japan, Australia, UK, Middle Eastern and European countries (Brandt & Lim, 2012). There is also increasing interest from US and Canada. The government says it expects the country to be hosting 1 million health travelers a year by 2020, contributing RM27.8 billion to gross national income (Brown, 2011).

The healthcare system in Malaysia is a mixed public-private one. In terms of the number of doctors, the ratio is fairly balanced. In 2002, for example, 54 per cent of the doctors were in the public sector and 46 per cent private (Leng, 2007). As according World Tourism Organization (WTO) report the worldwide earning for international tourism reached a new record of US\$623 billion (Madrid, 2013). As one of the factors contributing to globalization, the tourism industry has become more competitive than ever before due to the rapid development through information technology. Base on the report of United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) International tourist arrivals grew by 4% in 2012 to reach 1.035 billion, according to the latest UNWTO World Tourism Barometer. Emerging economies (+4.1%) regained the lead over advanced economies (+3.6%), with Asia and the Pacific showing the strongest results. Growth is expected to continue in 2013 only slightly below the 2012 level (+3% to +4%) and in line with UNWTO long term forecast (UNWTO: Report, (2013); (Madrid, 2013). With an additional 39 million international tourists, up from 996 million in 2011, international tourist arrivals surpassed 1 billion (1.035 billion) for the first time in history in 2012 (Madrid, 2013).

II-THE IMPORTANCE OF GLOBAL STRATEGIC MARKETING

Tourism is as an important economic activity for many countries in the globalized world. Like many countries, Taiwan has been engaging in the development of tourism, and its government has implemented several tourism strategies over the last decade. In order to successfully develop the industry, tourism marketing has been emphasized in various disciplines in which design is one of the key elements. Globalization has compressed the world as a whole with information technology playing an important role on the linkage of global networks (Fox, 2001).

Several researchers have pointed out the relationship between information technology and the formation of globalization (e.g., George 2006; James 1999; Wahab & Cooper, 2001).

Globalisation brings with it increasing interaction between nation states and has reinforced the relationships among them. This fosters the development of the international tourism industry (Das & Cassandra, 2009). Tourism has become one of the big global and globalized industries that are dominated by information (Werthner & Klein 1999). In fact, tourism and the Internet, a global communication technology, are two of the major factors of globalisation (Pechlaner & Raich, 2001).

In recent times, medical tourism has emerged in many countries as a new form of trade item or value-added tourist product. These countries have been actively developing this industry through government investment and support. It has been estimated that the global medical-tourism industry currently generates annual revenues up to US\$ 60 billion (negatively 40 billion), with 20% annual growth (Horowitz, Rosensweig, & Jones, 2007) (Ko, 2011).

III - GLOBAL STRATEGIC MARKETING AND COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

Global Strategic planning and channels allows the organizations to enter in the international markets. The government along with tourism companies needs to do some research prior attracting foreign tourists or medical tourist. This will improve the country's overall profitability, competitiveness as well as improve resources to be used in a better direction which effect overall profitability at the end of the day. The government and industry needed to improve the expert level in that specific field. At the early stage the companies should find compromises between the competitors and host environmental which may impact and justify the costs in each of the company's functions. In the beginning the company needs to take help of other people who are expert in tourism medical industry and consumers by giving those incentives and cash rebates and medical facilities like any other developed country. Marketing policy is the segmentation of the market. Segmentation is to divide a market which exists of heterogeneous products into homogeneous parts. The advantages of segmentation for a company are to be more efficient, to be able to find a niche market and to have a more simplified marketing policy. Positioning refers to the place a product occupies in consumers' minds regarding important attributes relative to competitive products. To position a product a company needs to be well informed about the competitors, target group and the own company. When there is enough knowledge acquired, a positioning matrix can be made.

IV- CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Ko, (2011), explained that, apart from high levels of interest in medical tourism in the public and private sectors, in academia and the mainstream media, there is a lack of theoretical research or models that comprehensively explain medical tourism systems and the relationships between systems and their component factors. As a result, there is much room for confusion and problems between industry stakeholders, governments, corporations, academia, research institutes and insurers. Thus a theoretical model that can comprehensively cover the phenomena of medical tourism systems is required, and the medical tourism system model is a vital component of this theoretical foundation. A study conducted by (Ko, 2011), has develop a medical tourism system model (MTSM) that can explain the roles and function of the components (medical tourists, medical tourist generating regions, medical tourist destination regions, suppliers of medical tourism products, intermediaries, medical tourism services, and human resources) of the medical tourism system. This model is also resolving conflicts among the components of the medical tourism industry and is contributing to the formation of rational policies regarding medical tourism (Ko, 2011).

V - ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Malaysia's Ministry of Health has formed a special national committee for the promotion of health tourism. This has contributed to the reversal of the geographical trend of medical tourism. In the past, patients from the east were travelling to the west to get the best medical treatment. Now, patients from Western developed countries, travel east to developing countries for the best medical and technologically advanced health care. Eastern Europe has now joined the bandwagon including Hungary and Poland which are popular for dental work (Al-Lamki, 2011).

Given below are some of the major issues and challenges faced by medical tourism industry in Malaysia:

1. Poor or no follow-up care.
2. After being in hospital for a short while and having a vacation, the patient comes home with, perhaps, complications of the surgery or side effects of the drugs. It is a surgical principle that every surgeon looks after his own complications and obviously that does not apply for most if not all patients who have been treated abroad.
3. Many countries have very weak malpractice laws and thus patients have limited ability to complain about poor medical care.
4. Medical tourism also affects the host countries with the problem of internal brain drain, whereby all good doctors give up serving the public sector to go into the exotic, private health centers, which serve the medical tourists.
5. Globalization impacts world health care, both in the host and the donor countries.
(Al-Lamki, 2011).

VI - GLOBAL MARKETING ENVIRONMENT

Medical Tourism Industry in global marketing environment is highly decentralized industry which operating across a broad range of countries to attract potential medical patients. In the global perspective no geographic area (including the home region) is assumed a priori to be the primary base for any functional area. Each function including research and development, sourcing, manufacturing, marketing and sales is performed in the location(s) around the world most suitable for that specific function and output of that industry (Akkaya, 2001).

Technology and globalization shape the world. All over the world medical companies and organizations are availing opportunities and one the best example is United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has taken serious steps to grow their Medical Tourism Industry as per their empirical data their Medical Tourism market has grew 7% in 2013 and their health care spending is predicted to hit USD 16.8bn by 2015 (Rai, 2013).

Globally Medical Tourism market is heavily promoting medical tourism since last many years, with visitor packages that are both attractive in term of location, healthcare facilities, expert staffs and in pricing. The Medical Tourism market is doing joint ventures and accreditation with other recognized and renowned medical organizations from developed countries (Nasim & Momaya, 2010)

There are challenges in term of medically recognized and qualified human resource. “Staffing is one of the biggest challenges facing the healthcare sector today, but you also can’t deny that UAE is still a very young player in the field of medical tourism,” (Rai, 2013).

Some of the critical challenges can be building the foundation for Medical Travel so that the tourist all over the world can be attracted in term of travel fright, medical facilities and expertise. In addition to that it is also a big challenge to develop an effective medical travel program in public hospitals. Overcoming the gap between accreditation and medical tourism and meet the new challenges.

There are some other challenges such as:

- How will healthcare globalization impact international patient travel?
- Integration and Structuring Effective Health Insurance.
- Plans to Meet the Needs of Travelling Patients
- Ensuring Quality and Managing Risks in Medical Travel.
- Out Sourcing of talent.
- Perfect pricing.

VII - CROSS CULTURAL COMPLICATIONS

There are some cross cultural complication which much suite the nature of medical tourism market such as style of business within the market. Language also plays an important role to the comfort level of patients. In the cross cultural complication apart from language, race and nationalities, geographic are also some of the significant divisions. On the other hand, institution plays an important role to attract the medical tourist. In the preference from the tourist perspective religious groups, educational system, mass media and family are the attraction factors to visitors. In the cross cultural setting socio cultural factors such as social interaction and hierarchies also help the tourist to select the medical tour destination (Vasiliki, 2012).

VIII - REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

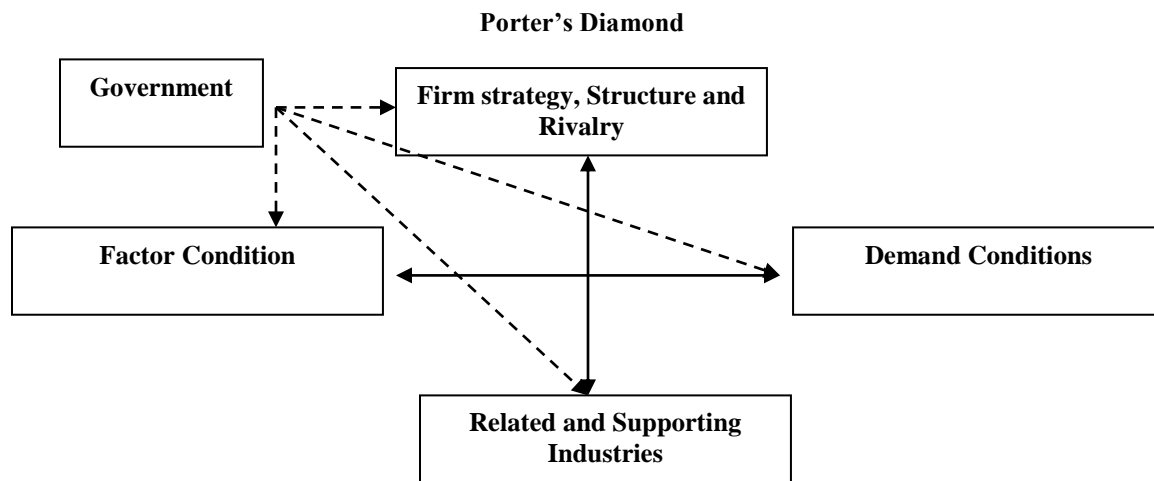
An adequate regulatory environment is required in term of role of government in Medical Tourism activities (free or not free markets). The government need to introduce a stable policy and try to decrease barriers to international tourist trade such as flexibility in taxing system and favourable tourist trade policies. However, laws and regulations affecting medical tourism marketing regulations can change the priority of tourist and laws and regulations affecting business activities such as acceptance of foreign investment, etc (Vasiliki, 2012)(Spasojevic.M & Susic.V, 2010).

IX - COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY

Competitive analysis and its strategy towards successful marketers depends on how unstable the medical tourism marketing environment is, and do it better than competitors. Whilst easy to say, in practice it is not easy to do. Many competitive industries and organizations are very difficult to penetrate, despite all the intelligence techniques that may be available to get information.

X - INDUSTRY ANALYSIS FORCES AND GLOBAL COMPETITION

Porter's diamond is the best ever shown model for business leaders, which may analyze which competitive factors may reside in their company's home country, and which of these factors may be exploited to gain global competitive advantages. The medical tourism market can also use the Porter's diamond model during a phase of globalization, in which their managers and corporate decision makers may use the model to analyze whether or not the home market factors support the process of globalization, and whether or not the conditions found in the home country are able to create competitive advantages on a global scale. Given below is the Porter's Diamond which shows the Medical Tourism strategy, demand conditions, factor condition and related and supporting industries.



Source : http://www.valuebasedmanagement.net/porter_diamond_model.html

XI - COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AND STRATEGIC MODELS

Competitive advantage is a primary concern for the marketing function within organizations. In addressing competitive advantage, marketing has drawn extensively on the work of Michael Porter. Porter's "five forces model" (Porter, 1985) provides the basis for structural analysis of industries in most texts (Baker, 1992; Bradley, 1995). Porter's model has also popularized what had tended to be the domain of macro-economists, namely the study of competitiveness. (Laurence, Paula Chris, 1999).

The competitive advantage gained through competitive exercises is often ownership-based, e.g. a strong market position, or access-based, e.g. winning over rivals by securing a dominant distribution channel in a jointly contested foreign market.

XII - STRATEGIC POSITIONING

Strategic positioning looks at more than just a particular product. Strategic positioning entails positioning your business or brand in the marketplace to your best advantage. This is especially important in a changing market because when the ground is shaking you need to be firmly on solid ground. Strategic positioning is more comprehensive than product positioning. Product positioning entails fighting for a marketing position in the mind of the customers. Strategic positioning goes beyond that by entrenching that position clearly in the minds of the leaders and staff of the business. That motivates them and guides their decision making. Porter's model suggests that study of firm advantage needs to take place in the context of a national environment. The national environment is conceptualized as four determinants

(and two exogenous variables) labeled the "diamond". The model advocates that any study of competitive advantage at firm level must take place within the context a particular domestic competitive environment or diamond. Thus, increasingly, marketing courses and texts incorporate the diamond as part of the analysis of industry (Baker, 1992; Laurence, Paula Chris, 1999). Strategic co-option attempts to align other parties' interest with that of the focal firm, providing possible competitive advantages by opening windows of opportunities, removing external obstacles or neutralizing threats. It is often done through a third party to influence the firm's fight with rivals. It also could happen between rivals who tacitly collude to jointly deal with customers or a third rival (Porter, 1980). The major difference between strategic co-option and cooperative maneuver is that the former is much more subtle, informal, implicit, sometimes illegal, but most times without clearly specified binding measures. A firm could also directly co-opt customers. It should be noted that, in general, competitive advantages gained through co-opting outside parties are primarily access-based, e.g. the right to access certain markets closed to other foreign competitors, or sometimes ownership-based, e.g. owning a special license obtained through lobbying.

XIII - COMPETITIVE INNOVATION AND STRATEGIC INTENT

Competitive innovation and medical tourism market strategy depends on a true competitive innovative, which should be rooted of a strong culture backgrounds that motivates the commitment in innovative behavior. Innovativeness is therefore includes of dua constructs innovations and innovative culture. The most important prespective is to promote medical tourism market learning culture automatically innovativeness will improve (Škerlavaj, Song, & Lee, 2010). The strategic intent usually incorporates stretch targets, which force companies to compete in innovative ways. It also consists of building layers of advantage, searching for "loose bricks," changing the terms of engagement, and competing through collaboration (Hamel and Prahalad, 2005).

Further more, medical tourism market these days are working hard to formulate a innovation strategy and from other participants. Innovation must be continous the reason due to the pace of change and competition in business or market is very fast and competitive. The continours factor of innovation should be strategize, which can further rise multiple innovation channels (Dean, 2004).

XIV - ANALYZING AND TARGETING GLOBAL MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

Globalization gives the impression to have shrunk the importance of geographical distance. Increasing volumes of global trade and capital flows are indicators of the globalization of the world economy. Technological developments have potentially made possible the incorporation of markets through two channels. First, information technology has improved and has easiness access to information regarding foreign countries and foreign partners. Second, technological improvements ease economic integration because they lower shipping costs (Buch, Kleinert, & Toubal, 2003).

W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne which has really make a good contribution to advancing the thinking on availing global market opportunities. The authors have given a clear purpose and the strategic view. With the help of practical frameworks and models that helps one to quickly shape up their organizational strategies. The objective is to target a market which is full of opportunity and create the strategy, rather than the other traditional approaches to strategy development According to the authors the Blue Ocean is a space and this space is based on global markets and this market is targeting new opportunities and customer and value proposition. In the simple words the Blue Ocean creates uncontested market space. On the other hand the Blue Ocean creates the competition irrelevant. As according to the author it helps to capture and create news demand and helps to break the value-cost trade off. This is the unknown market space. Blue oceans, in combination and contrast which are defined by untapped market space, demand creation, and the opportunity for highly profitable growth. Although some blue oceans are created well beyond existing industry boundaries, most are created from within red oceans by expanding existing industry boundaries, as Circe do Soleil did. In blue oceans, competition is irrelevant because the rules of the game are waiting to be set. On the other hand, Red ocean represents all the industries in existence today. This is the known market space. As per what the author discussed that Red oceans industry boundaries are defined and accepted and the competitive rules of the game are known. Here companies try to outperform their rivals to grab a greater share of existing demand. Red Ocean is competing in existing market place and it and beat the competition with exploiting the existing demand by making the value cost trade off. The red ocean helps to align the whole system of a firm's activities with its strategic choice of differentiations or low cost.

XV - GLOBAL MARKET AND BUYER

A study conducted by Tang, (2006), on Chinese SMEs found that weak tie weak-tie networks are crucial to the firms' trade growth in global markets and were proactively developed and exploited in the course of the firms' development. The author also provided alternative view saying that strong tie network in global markets change business values and approaches of the Chinese firms targeting at developing globally. In term of attracting buyers in global markets managerial implications concerning the important influence of intelligent buyers networking on global market can be located (Tang, 2006).

Strategic planning and channels allows the organizations to enter in the international markets. The corporate board and the line managers need to understand and address the internal arrangements to meet their external obligations. On the other hand the company needs to do some research prior entering to any foreign market in order to prevent any uncertainty. This will improve the company's profitability, competitiveness as well as improve the organization's resources to be used in a better direction which effect overall profitability at the end of the day. At the early stage the companies should find compromises between the competitors and host environmental which may impact and justify the costs in each of the company's functions. In the beginning the company needs to take help of suppliers, subcontractors, distributors, buyers and consumers by giving those incentives and cash rebates.

XVI - GLOBAL MARKET SEGMENTATION, TARGETING AND PRODUCT POSITIONING

Marketing policy is the segmentation of the market. Segmentation is to divide a market which exists of heterogeneous products into homogeneous parts. The advantages of segmentation for a company are to be more efficient, to be able to find a niche market and to have a more simplified marketing policy. Positioning refers to the place a product occupies in consumers' minds regarding important attributes relative to competitive products. To position a product a company needs to be well informed about the competitors, target group and the own company. When there is enough knowledge acquired, a positioning matrix can be made.

XVII - GLOBAL MARKETING STRATEGY

It is the process of conceptualizing and then conveying a finish or final product (tangible) or service (intangible) globally with the intention of reaching the international marketing community. Proper global marketing has the ability to catapult a company to the next level, if they do it correctly. Different strategies are implemented based on the region the company is marketing to. The organizations need to focuses on marketing popular items within the country. Global marketing is especially important to organizations or companies that make available products or services that have a worldwide demand. Globalization deals with the integration of the many country strategies and the subordination of these country strategies to one global framework. As a result, it is conceivable that one company may have a globalized approach to its marketing strategy but leave the details for many parts of the marketing plan to local subsidiaries. Few companies will want to globalize all of their marketing operations. The difficulty then is to determine which marketing operations elements will gain from globalization. Such a modular approach to globalization is likely to yield greater return than a total globalization of a company's marketing strategy (Akkaya, 2001).

XVIII - OPPORTUNITIES, ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The Malaysian government encourages the development of the healthcare industry through tax incentives. Yes the government is willing to avail opportunities by tax incentives. Tax incentives are available for building hospitals (industry building allowance), using medical equipment (exemption from service tax for expenses incurred on medical advice and use of medical equipment), pre-employment training (deduction for expenses incurred), promoting services (double deduction for expenses incurred on promotion of exports), and use of information technology. Furthermore, the national committee on health tourism has proposed further incentives, including exempting from taxes the revenue from foreign patients in excess of five per cent (threshold) of the total revenue for the hospital, double deduction for money spent on accreditation, and reinvestment allowance in relation to accreditation requirements. (MOH 2002b:110) (Leng, 2007).

Table 1- Private Medical Facilities and National Income

YEAR	Facilities	Hospital Beds		Per Capita GNP
	(NO)	(NO)	(% OF TOTAL)	(at Purchasers' Value, in 1978 prices, RM)
1980	50	1171	4.7	3221
1985	133	3666	14.5	3758
1990	174	4675	15.1	4426
1995	197	7192	19.4	5815
1997/8	216	9060	25.1	--
2000	224	9547	21.9	7593
2002	211	9849	25	--

Source: Ministry of Health (MOH) Annual Report, various years; GNP figures from Fifth and Seventh Malaysia Plans (Malaysia 1986, Malaysia 1996) cited in (Leng, 2007).

The above table 1 shows the private medical facilities and national income in Malaysia. As what we can see that in early 1980, private hospital beds made up only five per cent of total acute beds, but this private share again dropped in 1999 (to 21 per cent), an effect of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, but has since recovered to 25 per cent (2002) (Leng, 2007).

Table 2 - Hospital and Number of Beds in Malaysia

Year	Number of Public		Number of Private		Number of Registered Doctors and Dentists
	Hospitals	Beds	Hospitals	Beds	
2000	120	34573	224	9547	17763
2005	125	34414	218	10542	20796
2006	128	34761	222	10794	22856
2007	134	35739	223	11637	24877
2008	136	38004	209	11689	28742
2009	136	38004	209	12216	34103
2010	137	37793	217	13186	36789

Source: Ministry of Health Facts 2010, published by the Ministry of Health Malaysia August 2011, www.moh.gov.my accessed on 21st November 2011. Note: number of public hospitals includes MOH Special Institutions (Cited in (Brandt & Lim, 2012)

Given above table 2 show the updated statistics for public and private hospitals, number of registered doctors and dentists and number of beds in Malaysia. Challenged by the new competition from Thailand and Malaysia, Singapore has now increased its efforts, with MOUs signed at governmental level with some Middle Eastern countries, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain. Three growth areas have been targeted by Singapore Medicine heart, eye and cancer treatment. (The Straits Times, 26 November 2003). Indeed, the loss of doctors from the public sector has been significant, as medical officers and specialists leave for the private hospitals that are increasingly more lucrative due to a growing international market. So far, this has been offset by the recruitment of foreign doctors, as well as by the doctors who have to undergo their first three years of compulsory government service (Leng, 2007).

XIX - PRODUCT AND SERVICE MARKETING

To institutionalize quality assurance programmes in Malaysian Medical Tourism, and to make this visible, include encouraging private hospitals to seek and acquire governmental accreditation and quality (MS ISO 9000) certification. Accreditation of hospitals, introduced in 1997, is implemented by the MOH in collaboration with the Malaysian Society for Quality in Health.

Malaysian Medical tourism services sector is undeniably a key engine of growth in Malaysian Economy (Rouse & Basole, 2008). There are many reasons for the growth of the services sector in Malaysia, the reason due to increasing competition in a global economy, pressure to innovate, and changing customer demands. This has led to more complex environments, markets, product and service offerings, and stakeholder relationships (Shah, 2008).

The Malaysian government has allocated RM 10,276 million for health services according to the Ninth Malaysia Plan report (9MP), a 7% increase over the previous plan. It has plans to improve the condition of its existing hospitals in order to cope up with the rising and aging population. Over the last couple of years they have increased their efforts to overhaul the systems and attract more foreign investment. Presently product and services Malaysian hospitals are providing includes neurology, cardiology, neurosurgery, neuro & cardio pathology, neuro-oncology, cardiothoracic surgery, rehabilitation, advanced diagnostics and imaging, telemedicine, palliative care and so on. Apart from the product and services suppliers and buyers terms common with product-oriented industry. There are enablers in service-oriented industries. Private associations, accreditation firms, hotels, airlines are just some of the enablers that play a role in the medical

Tourism industry. In term of product and service Malaysia medical tourism industry is lacking in term of providing best quality of care that meets the international product and services standards. On the other hand, patient or medical tourists are having concerns of safety, privacy and comfort. It is also very important that medical tourist get personal consultation and care before, during and after treatment (Shah, 2008).

XX - GLOBAL STRATEGIC MARKETING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Currently, hotels and tourist agencies in Malaysia are linking up with medical centers to offer holiday packages that combine hotel accommodation together with health screening and medical check-ups (Wong 2003). A strong element in the Malaysian strategy is to capitalise on its image as a 'Muslim country', with easily available halal food and conveniences for practising Muslims. The Muslim countries targeted include Middle East countries, Brunei, and Bangladesh. Appointing 'local' agents is a common marketing strategy of hospitals. One recently-established company is aggressively employing both strategies – of targeting Muslim countries as well as tying up with agents in these countries (Leng, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Malaysian Government and medical tourism industry are trying their level best to align their initiatives and be competitive within the region. Malaysian private hospitals looks more export driven and playing an important role in attracting medical tourist. Furthermore, government needed to consider its taxing and exempting policy in order to make the public as well as private hospitals to be very competitive, modern and offering those services which other similar neighboring country industry is unable to offer.

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