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Guaranteeing quality abroad

Context Increasing numbers of patients travel abroad to reduce their expenses for medical care. Despite the apparent cost benefits, medical travellers are exposed to several risks (e. g. safety and quality of treatments abroad cannot be guaranteed), because no effective regulations exist. Establishing international quality standards in medical travel is the first step to minimise risks, and to ensure that medical travellers receive appropriate care.

Approach Firstly, we scoped existing international medical guidelines (by the Institute of Medicine, the OECD, and the WHO), and examined how these can be utilised for the development of international quality standards for medical travel. Secondly, we conducted an extensive literature search to complement the examined guidelines, and to identify the key domains to be considered for the development of international quality standards.

Results The evidence-based guidelines by the OECD offer a robust framework for establishing international quality standards in medical travel, yet international health care providers are not required to adhere to them due to the lack of an overseeing authority.

KEY DOMAINS FOR INTERNATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS IN MEDICAL TRAVEL

- 1 **Minimum standards for care**
- 2 **Financial responsibility**
- 3 **Patient-centred approach**

Recommendations Two steps need to be taken in order to establish international quality standards for medical travel. First, the OECD framework needs to be adapted for medical travel by incorporating the outlined key domains. Second, an international, independent and non-governmental organisation (e. g. ISO) needs to oversee the adherence to the quality standards. Undertaking these two steps can ensure the long-term quality, safety and effectiveness of medical travel.

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Further details on this project available in the following:

Kácha, O., Kovács, B. E., McCarthy, C., Schuurmans, A. A. T., Dobyns, C., Haller, E., Hinrichs, S., Ruggeri, K. An approach to establishing international quality standards for medical travel. *Frontiers in Public Health, Public Health Policy* (in submission).