

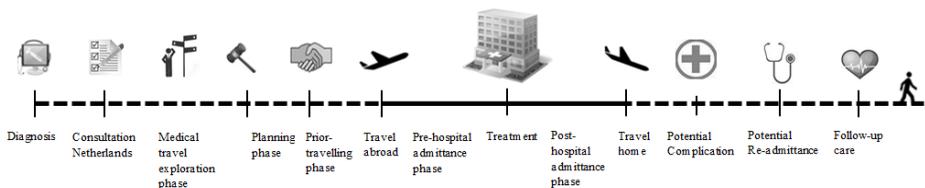


policy
for better lives.

Medical travel; unlimited possibilities or unlimited risks?

Context To facilitate medical travel within the European Union, the Patients' Rights Directive was created in 2011. This directive entitles EU citizens to reimbursement for cross-border care. However, apart from financial arrangements, no safeguards are in place to ensure safety and effectiveness. Limited research has explored the negative side-effects of medical travel.

Approach We aimed to identify the pitfalls along the full medical travel process by investigating the experiences of medical travellers. Between April and June 2014, 101 medical travellers participated in a questionnaire and reported the pitfalls they experienced. Additionally, experts received an open-ended questionnaire where they elaborated on the context of the issues raised.



Results For only 26.2% of our sample, medical information was known to the clinic abroad in advance. For 10.7%, the medical records remained unknown during treatment. Problems during follow-up care due to treatment abroad were experienced by 29.6%. Eventually, 11.1% did not receive follow-up care. Reimbursement was rejected for 8.3% of the patients.

Recommendations Awareness needs to be raised among physicians on the importance of collaboration with the clinic abroad and on the transfer of medical records to a clinic abroad and back. Yet, medical travellers need to understand that they eventually carry this responsibility. Furthermore, quality standards need to be developed to ensure that patients visit only the facilities of adequate quality. Provision of follow-up care should be monitored and corrected where problematic, potentially requiring adjustments to financial structures in some member states. Additionally, more clarification on reimbursement is necessary, with regards to eligibility and the duration of the process.

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Further details on this project available in the following:

Verra, S. E., Kroeze, R., Ruggeri, K. (2015) Facilitating safe and successful cross-border healthcare in the European Union. *Journal of Health policy (expected)*.