

# Culturally Competent Communication in Malaysia Medical Tourism

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## Abstract

Culturally competent communication has become increasingly important due to the growing demand for the health services in medical tourism. In Asia, the medical tourism sector is expanding rapidly. Moreover, with a steady rise in the number of tourists with different culture into Malaysia, has recognized the culturally competence communication as an important component of health care delivery. Thus, this paper provides an introduction to the culturally competence communication in healthcare industry specifically to the medical tourism. Furthermore, the relationship between nurses and patient in health care delivery reflect the quality of care in medical tourism. In particular, this paper has two objectives: (i) explore the nurses-patient relationship; (ii) determine how does culturally competent communication contributes to the quality of care in medical tourism. This paper will be a significant endeavor to contribute to the quality of healthcare in medical tourism. Moreover, this paper will also be beneficial to the authorities to enforce the important of culturally competent communication in medical tourism as part of quality of care improvement agenda. Subsequently, the result will provide some insights and information on communication and health.

**Key word:** *culturally competent communication, health communication, medical tourism, quality of care*

## Introduction

Medical tourism is the one of the significant contributor for the Malaysian economics. There are many challenges faced by healthcare in medical tourism. It is identified that language and cultural barriers in communication is one of the biggest challenge to healthcare (Office of Minority Health, 2003). Moreover, quality of care in medical tourism affected by language and cultural barriers (Xu, Shen, Bolstad, Covelli &

Torpey, 2010). Despite, providing health care to multi cultural patient in medical tourism is a complex endeavour that is highly depends on the communication of information (Joint Commission International, 2008). In addition, the rapidly growing medical tourism has increased culturally diverse foreign population in healthcare industries. Furthermore, the diversity brings opportunities and challenges to medical tourism (Center on an Aging Society, 2004). However, the cultural incompetence identified as a contributors to health disparities (Brach and Fraser, 2000) in healthcare.

Globalization across all sectors has brought a major changes and significant transformation in organizations which lead to a complex cultural situation (Behrmann & Smith, 2010). Hence, culturally competent communication has become increasingly important to our world of blending cultures, experience and business practices (Saeed, 1998). Culturally competent communication in health care function as a capability of a system to provide culturally competent care to patients from different culture (Carey, 2011). Furthermore, the vital goal of a health care system is to provide care and services to patients regardless of their skin colour, language and behaviours and increase patient's satisfactory levels on quality of care (Betancourt, Green & Carrillo, 2002).

Moreover, culturally competent communication services and the relationship with the patient in health care are identified as a critical key of success to the world's top and biggest hospital that is Texas Medical Centre. In addition, Joint Commission of International (JCI) also stressed the importance of culturally competent communication services in hospitals to provide quality of care. In addition, culturally competent communication between healthcare provider and patient is vital for good healthcare (Lee & Pacheco 2003).

When patients are from different culture, providing culturally appropriate healthcare is vastly more challenging (Pachter, 1994). Furthermore, it is identified that the potential conflict in tourism is cultural and religious values (Henderson, 2003). In addition, recent research shows that the ability to deliver nursing care with effective communication with patients from different culture is really a challenge for nurses in the 21st century (Flowers, 2004). This acknowledges that nurses need to be culturally competent in their interaction to the multi cultural patients. Moreover, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that nurses spend more time with patients in providing care and services compare to other groups of health professionals and they are also employed in a variety of settings in hospitals.

On the other hand, the main objectives of cultural competency in medical tourism is to create a better outcome by minimizing the communication gap, building cultural sensitivity, creating an awareness of cultural existence, increasing cultural knowledge and guide to communication skill to provide more positive result in healing and service satisfaction (John Sae, 2006). Such process requires culturally competent communication among healthcare provider to understand patient's need and the impact on delivery of healthcare services (Kieran O'Hagen, 2001).

Culturally competent communication in medical tourism indicates that patient place a relatively high satisfaction level and comforting in an easier healing at the end of the day (Kleinman, 1980). Also, the comfort of a patient supports the considerable attention of their treatment and adherence. In addition, culturally competent communication is widely recognized as integral to the elimination of disparities in health care (Taylor & Lurie, 2004). Moreover, globalisation has lead the countries to culturally expand which brought complex culturally competence needs in an already culturally diverse world.