

MEDICAL TOURISM TO THAILAND: SUBJECTIVITY, HEALTH MARKET DISCOURSE, AND UNCOVERING LIFE EXPERIENCES OF MYANMAR MEDICAL TOURISTS

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ABSTRACT

This study using the critical medical anthropology approach aimed at understanding the subjectivities and experiences of Myanmar medical tourists within the context of medical tourism to Thailand and aimed to explore the healthcare context in Myanmar and Thailand, the discourse of medical tourism and the marketing strategies influencing the perceptions and experiences of Myanmar medical tourists.

Qualitative research was conducted with in-depth interviews, narratives interviews, documentary study, and non-participant observations. Ten informants and nine key informants aged 40-75 years old who came for medical tourism Thailand for at least one week participated in this study.

The findings show that political and economical forces related to the healthcare systems in Myanmar and Thailand led Myanmar patients to the need of medical tourism in Thailand. Myanmar people suffer from unaffordable and inaccessible routine healthcare inherited from the political economical forces resulting from the historical military government regime, while the international commercial healthcare constituted medical and market discourses through marketing strategies drive people to seek better healthcare services abroad. Thai healthcare was perceived as an international and trusted service with good outcomes of treatment. Medical tourism discourse shaped their options about relying on medical experts and high technology. Though the subjective experiences of Myanmar medical tourists included frustration regarding lack of information, risk concerns, and treatment outcomes, they could not voice their concerns, which reflect power relations in the international health service.

It is recommended to promote health literacy among medical tourists, coupled with adequate access to accurate information, which will heighten patients' abilities to make informed decisions about medical tourism.

KEY WORDS: MEDICAL TOURISM THAILAND / PEOPLE FROM MYANMAR/ SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES/ MEDICAL TOURISM DISCOURSE

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