

YAŞAR UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

TOURISM MANAGEMENT MASTER THESIS

A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON THE WEAKNESSES

&

STRENGTHS OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN IRAN

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ABSTRACT

A Qualitative Research on the Weaknesses & Strengths of Medical Tourism in Iran

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April 2017

This qualitative study aims to reveal the weaknesses and strengths of medical tourism in Iran at present situation. To proceed the study a research question was raised as follows: “What are the weaknesses (challenges) and strengths (potentialities) of medical tourism in Iran at present time?” To find the answer to this research question a list of questions were prepared through reviewing the literature on the key-issues which affect the medical tourism industry positively or negatively in any country. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with the participants. The results of the data analysis showed that items like low quality of facilities, lack of accreditation and international licenses, problems with money transferring and lack of credit card using, aviation and transportation problems, lack of systematic plans for medical tourism attraction, ideological and religious traits like compulsory Hijab are among weaknesses. Factors like low medical costs, short distance of traveling, skillful and experienced medical specialists, good geographical situation, political and economic stability, people’s hospitality are among the strengths within Iran’s medical tourism situation.

Key Words: Iran, Medical Tourism, Weakness, Strength

ÖZ

İran Medikal Turizminin Güçlü ve Zayıf Yönleri Üzerine Niteliksel Bir Araştırma

Sedighi, Sepehr

Yüksek Lisans, Turizm Management

Danışman: Asst.Prof. Dr. Ferika Özer Sari

Bu niteliksel çalışma İran'ın günümüz koşullarında sağlık turizminin güçlü ve zayıf noktalarını ortaya çıkarmayı hedeflemektedir. Çalışmayı yürütmek için araştırma sorusu "Günümüzde İran'ın sağlık turizminin güçlü (potansiyelli) ve zayıf (zorlayıcı) yönleri nelerdir?" şeklinde sorulmuştur. Bu araştırma sorusuna cevap bulabilmek için, herhangi bir ülkenin sağlık turizmini güçlü ve zayıf yönde etkileyen anahtar noktaları inceleyen literatür araştırması sonucunda oluşturulan soru formu hazırlanmıştır. Veriler, katılımcılarla yapılan derinlemesine yüz yüze görüşmeler ile toplanmıştır. Veri analizi sonuçları gösterdi ki; tesislerdeki hizmet kalitesi eksikliği, akreditasyon eksikliği ve uluslararası lisanslarının olmayışı, para transferinde yaşanan problemler ve kredi kartı kullanımının azlığı, havacılık ve ulaşım problemleri, sağlık turizminin gelişmesi yönünde sistematik planlamanın olmayışı, zorunlu türban gibi ideolojik ve dini özellikler zayıf yönler arasındadır. Düşük tıbbi masraflar, kısa mesafe yolculuk imkânları, yetenekli ve tecrübeli tıp uzmanları, coğrafi olarak uygunluk, politik ve ekonomik istikrar, halkın misafirperverliği gibi faktörler ise İran'ın sağlık turizmindeki güçlü yönleri arasındadır.

Key Words: İran, Medikal Turizm, Zayıf Yönler, Güçlü Yönler

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my knowledgeable and patient advisor Asst. Prof. Dr Ferika Ozer Sari whose knowledge, guidance and supervision made the achievement of this dissertation possible.

I also owe thanks to Asst. Prof. Dr. Gokce Ozdemir for all her kindness and guidance since the beginning of my studying in Yasar University.

I am thankful to my father that helped me in this achievement and never gave up on me.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family for supporting me at all time and pushing me forward and gave me motivation and hope since the beginning of my studying.



Sepehr Sedighi
İzmir, 2017

TEXT OF OATH

I declare and honestly confirm that my study, titled “A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON THE WEAKNESSES & STRENGTHS OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN IRAN” and presented as a Master’s Thesis, has been written without applying to any assistance inconsistent with scientific ethics and traditions. I declare, to the best of my knowledge and belief, that all content and ideas drawn directly or indirectly from external sources are indicated in the text and listed in the list of references.

Sepehr Sedighi

Signature

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October 24, 2017

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SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

(GTI) Global Wellness Institute

(TUOTO) The International Union of Official Travel Organization

(HPCSA) Health professions council of South Africa

(AHPC) Allied health professions

(UNESCAP) United Nation Economic and Social commission for Asia and Pacific

(OSMEP) Office of SMEs promotions

(TAT) The Tourism Authority of Thailand

(JCI) Joined Commission International

(CIS) Common Wealth of Independent Stated

(ISA) International Spa Assembly

(ESCAP) Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

(MT) Medical Tourism

CHAPTER ONE

MEDICAL TOURISM IN IRAN AND AROUND THE GLOBE

1.1. Introduction

Tourism industry is considered as one of the most important sources of income for many countries in the world, and it plays a very important role in the improvement and flourishing of the economy of countries. Tourism industry not only has kept its traditional general meaning which focused on traveling inside or outside of the country for leisure, sightseeing, historical interests and etc, but in globalization era it has found new meaning and because of its classification into several branches which in turn come from different functions of these different branches like historical tourism, geographical tourism, sport tourism and last but not least, health tourism. Health tourism as one of the most important sub-branches of tourism industry, has played significant role in the economic improvement of countries and those countries which learned from their experiences and started their own activities in establishing of health tourism organization in their countries later on. Among countries which enjoy longer history and more attractions in medical tourism in the world we may name, South Africa, Turkey, Thailand, Jordan, Singapore, Hong Kong and recently Iran that has taken the first step towards attracting attention of health and medical tourists from Asian countries, European countries and even United States of America.

The aim of health tourism according to Global Wellness Institute (GTI) (2014), is maintaining health and its improvements and betterments which are considered a global inclination covering all ages, social classes, cultures, and beliefs existing in all continents. In fact the desire to get rid of illnesses, enjoying healthy life, longer life and flourishing of man's mental and physical powers, personal capacity all are rooted in man's beginning of civilization.

Based on Watson's and Stolley's views (2012), man has always felt the need to escape the daily ordinary crowded life and get to calm places like quiet sea shores to enjoy physical and mental rest and calmness. During the times that worker classes were not able to pay for traveling to other places, the rich and classes that are more affluent were able to

enjoy long or short trips to far places. Gradually, these people added another reason for their trips, which was seeking places for curing their diseases while traveling for seeing new places and enjoying life. This was probably the beginning of what is now called health tourism Shalbfian (2016).

In Hall's view (2004), health tourism goes back to ancient Greece and Roman Empire when people from these lands travel to Mediterranean region to enjoy bathing in hot waters springs, this gave them relaxation and calmness, refreshing physical and mental powers. The experience of bathing in hot waters for curing disease such as skin infection, rheumatism, digestion problems were common in England, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, and some other places in European cities during the last centuries. In the United States, Saratoga warm waters were discovered around 200 years ago and a business place was built there which provided residential and reception services Vajirakocham (2004). Day by day, other facilities like those that hotels, spas, sport fields, theaters, and music halls were built around mineral, hot waters, and people traveled to these places not only for pleasure but also for getting back their health and physical and mental recovery. Therefore, this was how the concept of health tourism was spread globally and little by little, it was perceived that along with health tourism, sick people could cure their diseases by traveling to places where they could receive medical treatments. That is "why medical tourism" which means traveling of people to other place elsewhere than their usual place of living is a newer word than health tourism Carrera and Bridges (2006).

1.2. Definition of Health Tourism

Many countries in the world have found medical tourism as a source of income along with general tourism in their system of economy among which some are of developing countries in Asia. Gradually these countries have felt that there is a kind of competition going on in Asian countries, a number of them have seized the business opportunity that medical tourism can bring to their countries, among them we may name Turkey, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, have become center of medical tourism.

According to “The International Union of Official Travel Organization (TUOTO)” (2002) health tourism consists in preparation of health facilities using a country’s natural blessing like mineral waters and enjoying good climate conditions. According to Harahsha (2002) the above definition is too narrowed because it only refers to enjoying mineral waters and good climate conditions and it ignores patient’s companies as health tourists. Goodrich (1987) defines health tourism as any measurement that for example a hotel or a tourism destination can take to improve health facilities and equipment beyond common ones which can attract more tourists, and Laws (2002) refers to health tourism as a leisure trip in which one purpose is to improve health condition of the trip taker as a tourist, this short definition looks simple but very meaningful.

On the other hand Omran (2002) believes that health tourism is to travel to a destination for the sake of medicine treatment or taking rest and become relax to keep one’s physical and mental conditions in a good shape. Megableh (2002) defines health tourism as a trip taken by a patient for one day as the shortest and maybe one year as the longest time of his usual place of life with the aim of getting treatment service or prevent of disease instruction to stop its critic conditions. People accompanying the patient are also considered as health tourists. As we can see, this last idea in Megableh’s definition is in opposition with the definition suggested by (IUOTO) which does not count patient’s accompanies as health tourists.

An interesting definition but short and to the point is Malaysia’s ministry of health’s definition which believes that health tourism consist in travel with the aim of improving physical, mental, psychological conditions of people, families and particular groups’ medical cares and health condition are recognized factors in this kind of trip. Bennet, King and Milner (2004) suggest three characteristic within a health trip:

- Traveling out of one’s usual place of living
- Gaining health and keeping health as the primary goal of the trip
- Doing sport activities in a sport complex

Another more detailed definition has been given by Hall (2002) extracted from Harahsha (2002). Hall argues that health trip is a phenomenon that has emerged in

industrial societies in which a person takes a trip to elsewhere than his permanent place of living with purpose of improving his/her health conditions and keep maintaining it.

What motivates the person to choose such a destination is usually the high standards quality of technological equipment and facilities in addition to low costs of service offered at destination. In this definition important factors need for health and medical tourism are spoken of such as technology, facilities, equipment, quality, services and last but not least low costs which are probably advertised by destination hospitals, hotels and tourism organizations.

A rather definition of health tourism has been given Chazen (2004) based on studies on health tourism in Australia, Germany, Slovenia and Italy, in this definition health tourism is kind of economic activity within purpose of improving and maintaining mental and physical condition of the customers (traveler) in which they enjoy natural physical treatments like massage and physical exercises needed.

According to Chazen (2004), health tourism are guests or travelers who spend some of their time on receiving special medical services and the rest of their time spend on their leisure activities as they wish, therefore health tourism is a product of medical aims and tourism at the same time, as a result the development of the services of health tourism calls for preparation of natural medicines suitable for tourists, medical facilities and equipment, medical supervision, suitable staying places and building health villages. From Chazen point of view, in any kind of tourism, there are factors and elements which try to prevent diseases and improve physical, mental and psychological of the tourists but it is only in health tourism that the trip is decided and performed for health betterment and improvement.

A close look at the definition of health tourism surveyed and presented in this research, we may come up with some similar elements and factors shared more or less in all of them, for example there is always a person who leaves his usual place of living, he or she may be accompanied by friends or relatives and this person decides or is recommended to take a trip to elsewhere than his common place of life with the aim of enjoying good climates conditions and natural resources like mineral waters and sightseeing, for physical, mental and psychological improvements or the trip may be taken for medical aims or prevention of diseases.

The person who is called a tourist is also called a guest as well and from economic point of view is called a customer who receives traveling services and medical or health services at the destination place and also housing and transportation, suitable foods etc. The health tourist must pay for all kind of services he or she receives.

Naturally, in this process of social activity or faction of human life which started in industrial countries and states, the need was left to find places in the world which enjoyed privileges of natural resources like good climatic conditions, natural geographical locations like beautiful forests, lakes, mountains, seas and the like which bring health, bodily and mentally to human beings and maintains their health life and cure diseases.

This part of review of literature surely will shed some light on the way of the researcher to be able to focus on improvement issues and factors contained not only in the definitions already explained but also will help him or her to get ideas on deciding on the definition of operational terms used in chapter one of the study and also in chapter two which will present the methodology for data collection and analysis.

1.3. Typology of Health Tourism

One of the most important categorization on typology of health tourism is that of Jallad (2001), of Muller and Kaufman (2001), and of Harahsheh (2002). These are explained in details as follows. Harahshah (2002) defines medical tourism as a trip made intentionally for curing some diseases or kind of surgery operations in hospitals or medical centers with an average of two weeks' time based on medical cures that patients' needs. Jallad (2001) has categorized health tourism into:

(a) *Medical Tourism* (b) *Curative Tourism* and (c) *Preventive Tourism*.

- a) According to Jallad (2000), medical tourism consists in traveling for the sake of curing a diseases or having a surgery operation in a hospital or clinics under supervision of medical authorities. In this type of tourism the patient may need to reside in some spas for a specific period of time for recovery.
- b) Curative tourism based on Jallad's view means to travel with the purpose of curing a particular disease including recovery time under medical supervision, enjoying

natural curative resources like mineral waters, salt-lakes, sun-bathing, radioactive sands, sludge or wallowing and clean air etc.

- c) Preventive tourism: according to Carrera and Bridges (2008) health tourism is an organized travel from one's living place to another place which take place so as to preserve recovery and to access to the person's physical and psychological health again. Health tourism includes "medical tourism", "truth tourism" and "preventive tourism". There are many other definitions for this term provided in the review of literature of this study.

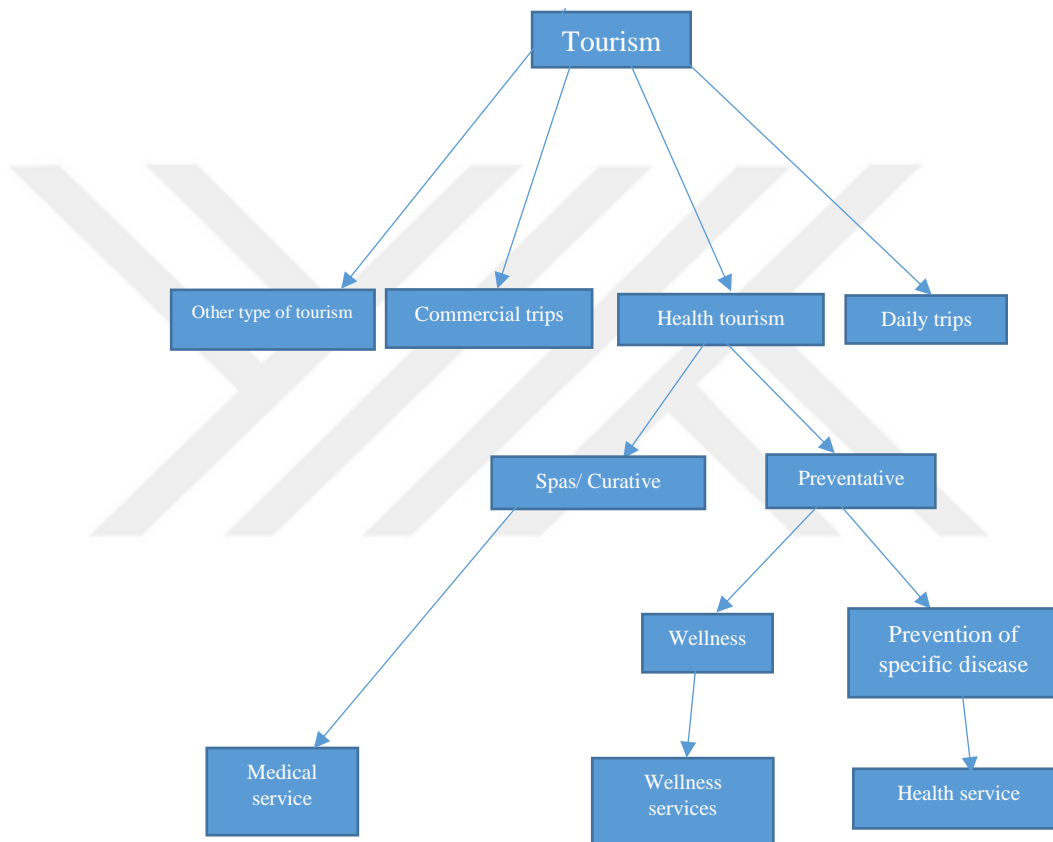
Preventive tourism or health caring in Jallad's opinion, refers to traveling to health villages, spa and the like to get rid of daily stresses and recover lost energy without medical services or supervision. "The tourist does not suffer from any physical diseases Harahsha (2002); Muller and Kaufman (2001) classified health tourism into two groups, first those healthy people who travel for preventive aims and second ill people who suffer from particular diseases and travel for curative purposes.

In this categorization, the services given to healthy people i.e. those who do not suffer from any diseases for the sake of preventive aims can be divided into two parts; first there are measurements for illness prevention like dieting on low calorie foods and weight losing diets to prevent high cholesterol and abnormal body metabolism for people who are apt and subject to such disease. Secondly, in health keeping tourism, people staying in villages and spa-hotels receives services like massage, physio-therapy and yoga.

Muller and Kaufman (2001) also believe that health tourism specifically for ill people is called "spa and convalescence" tourism in which services like medical spas, and spa hospitals are provided for them. Some of these services are like those given in spa-villages but there is a difference between them. In medical-spas and spa-hospitals there are physicians available for patient's check-up, treatment and surgery operations in these centers.

According to Shalbofian (2008) Mullar & Kaufmann (2001) categorization of tourism in general, and health tourism in particular somehow can be shown in a table like the followings:

Figure 1: Categorization of tourism in general



Source: Mullar and Kaufmann (2001) in Shalbfian (2008)

As the table above shows health tourism consists the two sub categories which are preventive and curative.

Harahsha (2002) categorizes health tourism as follow:

- **Health tourism** is a trip taken maybe for the sake of curing physical diseases in hospitals or clinics or enjoying natural sources for treatment, like mineral waters,

salt lakes and the like which is not only cure diseases but also brings calmness and relaxation to people. These might take a period of two up to four weeks.

- **Medical tourism** is a trip intentionally for curing some diseases or kind of surgery operations in hospitals or medical centers with an average of two weeks based on medical cares that the patient needs.
- **Curative tourism** is a trip for treatment of some bodily disturbances like skin diseases breathing problems, arthritis and the like the patients may also enjoy availability for mineral waters, radioactive sands, salt lakes etc. for treatments they may also benefit from minor or major medical cares as well.

A close look at the definition given so far, very simply we can see that there are some confusions about correct meaning of such terms like health tourism, medical tourism, wellness tourism, preventive tourism, curative tourism, etc. In many cases, health tourism and medical tourism have been used interchangeably all over the world sometimes, health tourism have been used for both, medical tourism and wellness tourism and in some other cases, it has been used as a synonym for medical tourism. These confusions of meaning may cause problems for the industry on the one hand, therefore, to cope with this thread, cares must be taken to use the terminology of the area of health tourism correctly, especially in marketing and consumer's attitudes.

The ideas explained above all were discussed and recommended by international spa assembly (2011). To get rid of the confusion concerning the correct meaning and correct usage of health tourism terminology, the international Spa Assembly (2011) provided the correct definition for the common term used or that should be used in the following chart, Shalbfian (2016).

Table 1: Differences between wellness tourism and medical tourism

Wellness Tourism	Medical Tourism
<p>Wellness Tourism: A trip taken out of one’s usual place of living for the sake of engaging in some special activities which bring him or her a better health condition and bodily wellness lengthening.</p> <p>The motivation for the person to take this trip is also to benefit from the other people’s experience concerning unique ways of keeping healthy domestically or location-based ones.</p> <p>Wellness Tourist: This refers to a healthy person disease who aims at living his usual place of living to engage in special activities which bring him or her more wellbeing and bodily or mental health and calmness</p>	<p>Medical Tourism: A trip taken out of one’s usual living place with the aim of curing a disease, a chronic disease, a surgery operation or a beauty operation or cosmetic surgery. The motivation behind this kind of trip is lower cost and higher quality of medical services which cannot be found in his or her usual place of living.</p> <p>Medical Tourist: A person who takes a trip out of his usual place of living, This person happens to be suffering from a disease or a chronic one or is in need of surgery operation. The trip is taken with the aim of curation or getting rid of the disease, cosmetic surgery, dental services and the like.</p>

Source: International Spa Assembly (2011) extracted by Shalbafian (2016).

To sum up this part of review of the literature on definitions and categorization of health tourism, we may conclude that there are similarities and differences between medical tourism and wellness tourism and as it was said before, sometimes health tourism is used to refer to both of them.

Anyhow, the similarities are that in both a person must take a trip out of his or her usual place of living outside or inside his or her country, and both must pay for the services they receive and they are searching for lower prices than those which are offered at their place of living and also they are interested in services with higher quality, with lower prices as well.

The differences are that in medical tourism, the tourist is suffering from a disease or need surgery operation, or cosmetic surgery, dental surgery etc. But in wellness tourism the person is not sick or ill at all, he or she is searching for a better wellbeing physically

and mentally, need calmness and relaxation and wants to learn about precautions and preventative experiences to keep healthy and enjoy longer life-span.

1.4. The Pioneer Countries in Health Tourism

Health tourism which includes both medical and wellness tourism is considered as one of the most important sources of income for many countries now days, this fact has attracted the attention of many other countries which can offer health services because of enjoying suitable geographical and climatic conditions on the other hand, and high standard health and medical services and other related services to give to their customers, on the other hand.

According to Heungetal (2011), medical tourism development mostly depends on the removal of the geographical barriers which prevent traveling among countries. This enables ill people pass borders more easily Hall (2013), this fact paved the way for consideration on medical tourism on its beyond frontiers aspect internationally and consequently medical tourist could reach suitable medical services they wished for whenever and wherever they wanted.

According to International Spa Assembly (2011) medical tourism is an evolutionary process in which medical tourists or people usually travel from the industrial and more developed countries for medical treatment to less developed or developing countries this new phenomenon of medical tourism is different from the traditional one in which people from less developed countries traveled to more developed ones to enjoy more advanced and more progress about treatment in a highly equipped medical centers.

In fact the old model of medical tourism has been replaced by a new one in which the route of traveling to developed country has become reverse. Nowadays most people travel to countries different with lower level of development with the aim of medical treatments. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no one way of medical travel any longer, but a complicated complex of many mutual routes.

It is of interest to know why these changes have happened in the market of medical tourism. Hall (2013) believes that the reason behind this turning of situations is first of all high prices of medical services in the long waiting list of patients interested in traveling to

more developed countries; and secondly easiness of traveling and availability of high standards and more advanced medical services and travel service and lower prices in developing countries. That is why medical centers especially in Asian developing countries have improved considerably and such countries have felt the importance of investing on this market in persuading private sector to do so as well. One more important reason concerning this switch of medical destination from developed countries to developing countries according to Connell (2006) was district regulation on issuing visa for the US and European countries after September 11. The aftermath of September 11 caused the rush of patient to choose Asian developing countries instead of European and that US, this confirms Teh & Chu's (2005) view that September 11 happenings change the road of medical tourism from west to east particularly it open its way to Asia with more acceleration.

1.4.1. South Africa

According to the International Spa Assembly (ISA), South Africa is a pioneer player in the field of medical tourism particularly in beautification surgery this country is going to be one of the most progressive destinations for medical tourism very soon. The privileges that South Africa enjoys in medical tourism attraction is almost the perfect travel packages which includes variety of services concerning medical tourism such as safari, staying in recovery spas or all the wellness activities like sunbathing, sand bathing etc, of course other privileges like good command of the English language, western culture, low medical prices, are also incentive to motivate patience to choose South Africa, as the medical destinations, medical prices in south Africa is 40 to 60 percent of expenses in the US or Europe, anyway this country is still considered as an expensive one when compared with prices in Asian countries. Based on the International Spa Assembly in 2011 the following organizations are involved in all kinds of tourism in South Africa:

- South Africa Tourism Department of Health
- Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)
- Allied Health Professions Council (AHPC)

- Medical Tourism Association of South Africa
- Economic Development Agency
- Massage Therapy Association of South Africa
- South African Medical Association
- South African Spa Association

This list may help the researcher of this study to make comparison with other countries to find out what goes on concerning tourism in general, and medical tourism in particular in these countries. The titles of these organizations also reveals how much important South African government and private sectors they attach to tourism industry on the one hand and the nature and variety of functions and duties that they are assigned to perform on the other hand.

To sum up one more paragraph about medical tourism in South Africa seems necessary. Generally speaking the most popular medical treatments that local and international patients are asking for in south Africa is beautification surgery but many other operations like body organs, implantation, heart surgery, orthopedic surgeries, obesity surgeries, dental surgeries are also of common medical services offers in South Africa. ISA (2011).

1.4.2. Jordan

Jordan is another pioneer country concerning medical tourism and in comparison with other countries which offer medical service to patients internationally is more experienced and has been in arena of medical tourism longer time, and as a result has become more famous and popular specially since 1970 when Arabs patients visited Jordan's medical and curative facilities which were credited by these patients. Medical and tourism authorities decided to accelerate the rate of the improvement of this industry more seriously. According to International Spa Assembly (2011) Jordan is considered as one of the leaders of medical tourism in the Middle East. In 2005 Jordan was credited as the most important center of medical tourism in the Middle East; the World Bank 2008 introduced Jordan as

the first rank destination in medical tourism in the Middle East and the fifth rank destination for medical tourism internationally.

The International Spa Assembly in (2011) credited Jordan for enjoying such privileges like low price of medical treatment and medical precautions at least 40% cheaper than prices in America and Europe and also 5% to 10% cheaper than other countries in the region. The second factor of popularity for medical tourism in Jordan is related to good reputation of its medical specialists who almost all of them have graduated from American and British universities. They enjoy very good English language skills and other languages as well. Wellness tourism in Jordan has not developed as much as medical tourism according to (I S A 2011) some privileges that Jordan enjoyed concerning wellness to resume are as follows:

- Natural curative sources
- Suitable geographical situation
- Political stability
- Low prices of curative services warm and also hot mineral water
- Proportional low air humidity
- Plenty sunshine and sunny days (more than 300 sunny days in a year)

The role of government and private sector on improvement of medical tourism in Jordan has been very important according to (ISA 2011). Jordan's government has supported this industry continuously and believes medical tourism is one of the most important national economy section of the country which is improving day by day, wellness tourism has also been improving alongside medical tourism during recent years. The government is now placing health tourism as a decisive factor on its tourism development in general and has offered good incentive to motivate private sector to invest more into health tourism which include both wellness tourism and medical tourism. The following organizations are involved tourism and health tourism in general in Jordan.

- Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
- Jordan Tourism Board

- Jordan Investment Board
- Ministry of Health Regulatory Body for Health Service
- Healthcare accreditation councils
- Jordan Private Hospital Association
- Jordan Nursing Council
- Medical Services Cluster

1.4.3. Thailand

Based on International Spa Assembly (2011) Thailand has a leading role in medical tourism and enjoy high level of success in popularity outside the country. Medical tourism started in 1970th when Western countries chose this country's medical destination for beautification surgery and other operations like sex reassignment surgery, which was not recognized by their home country and not covered by government or private insurance. According to Connell (2008) since these type of surgery are not on their insurance coverage or expensive ones in Europe or the United States patients prefer a country, which offer these medical service cheaper and faster. As Cohen (2008) states although Thailand entered this field so early, it was at the end of 80s and beginning of 1990s that a few modern and a highly equipped hospitals were established. They were of private sectors offering medical services to some VIP people inside and outside the country. This paved the way for the rapid developing of medical tourism in the coming years which brought about interentional credit and fame, and as a result of more advanced improvement in medical technology and more modern equipped with luxurious rooms. Doctors were graduated from Western Universities, authorized hospital, technicians an experts precaution manpower, low and logical prices of medical services, infrastructure of outstanding medical facilities made this country as one of the most important medical tourism center of the world. The above information has been confirmed by UNESCAP (2014) United Nation Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific.

Thailand is also a pioneer country for health (wellness) tourism and spa tourism. Thailand's traditional curative traits concerning physical, mental and psychological

remedies through yoga, meditation and massage therapy have attracted many patients internationally. Now one can find spa centers, recreational places and wellness centers have caused the coinage of expression “Authentic Thai Experience”. According to many sources like ISA (2011) medical tourism industry in Thailand has improved rapidly since 1993. The famous and equipped spas close to 5-star hotels and shopping centers and recreation spots brought about more calmness and comforts to increasing patient day by day.

Thailand government is a strong supporter of tourism in general and medical tourism have been persuaded and appreciated by the government. Medical universities in Thailand give some grants to medical students of developing countries each year. This, as a result, connects medical education to medical tourism and prepares the situation for a variety of medical services and the improvement of this industry more than before. The following organizations cooperate in tourism and medical tourism in Thailand:

- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Public Health
- Office of SMEs Promotions (OSMEP)
- Thai Spa Association
- Medical Tourism Cluster of Thailand
- Thailand Medical Tourism Blog Contest
- The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)
- Department of Export Promotion
- Department of Industrial Promotion

There are many private organizations involved in health and medical tourism in Thailand which enjoy international fame. Medical services offered in Thailand have been appreciated and admired by authorized experts internationally particularly in treatments of tropical and infectious diseases, heart surgeries and post-operative cares, beautification surgeries, dental treatments, chronic diseases treatments related to bones and cataracts have been admired internationally. The majority of patients choosing Thailand as a medical destination come from Japan, Taiwan, Pakistan, China, Borneo and Bangladesh Connel

(2008). There are also patients from the Middle East, America, England and Australia. These incoming medical tourists to Thailand have flourished Thailand's economy remarkably.

1.4.4. Turkey

It goes without saying that Turkey enjoys high rank in general tourism because of so many historical interests all over the country. Wonderful geographical location, nice Mediterranean climatic conditions, and beautiful natural landscape, forests, sea sides, rich culture and variety of food that can satisfy the taste of tourists from all over the world. One important point about this country is that it is the bridge between Europe and Asia. So it is not surprising that Turkey attracts thousands of tourists from all over the world. In cities like Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, one may encounter tourists from all parts of the globe all day long Shalbfian (2016)

Although medical tourism started developing around 15 years ago, it is now one of the most advanced centers of medical and wellness tourism confirmed by many authorized sources in the world Shalbfian (2016). Recently the development of medical tourism is moving faster alongside of general tourism in Turkey which has met great positive changes. It is a very important zone of economy focusing on bringing in foreign money and opening new chances to the interested to invest in medical tourism.

According to Republic of Turkey Ministry of Health in 2013, in addition to medical tourism in Turkey, there are three other types of tourism within health tourism as follows: Thermal, Spa/wellness Tourism, Elderly Tourism, and Disabled Tourism. Health tourism in Turkey has been improving since older times till now and has developed more investment in Thermal (warm water) as fast as possible.

Hot and warm waters resources in Turkey are considered as one of the most important natural wealth of this country. It is believed by many experts that mineral waters and hot waters in Turkey are better than those of Europe on the part of quality in curative characteristics. The establishment of high rank hotels close to this water has brought world

fame for Turkey and has been given seventh rank in the word on hot water and warm water resource.

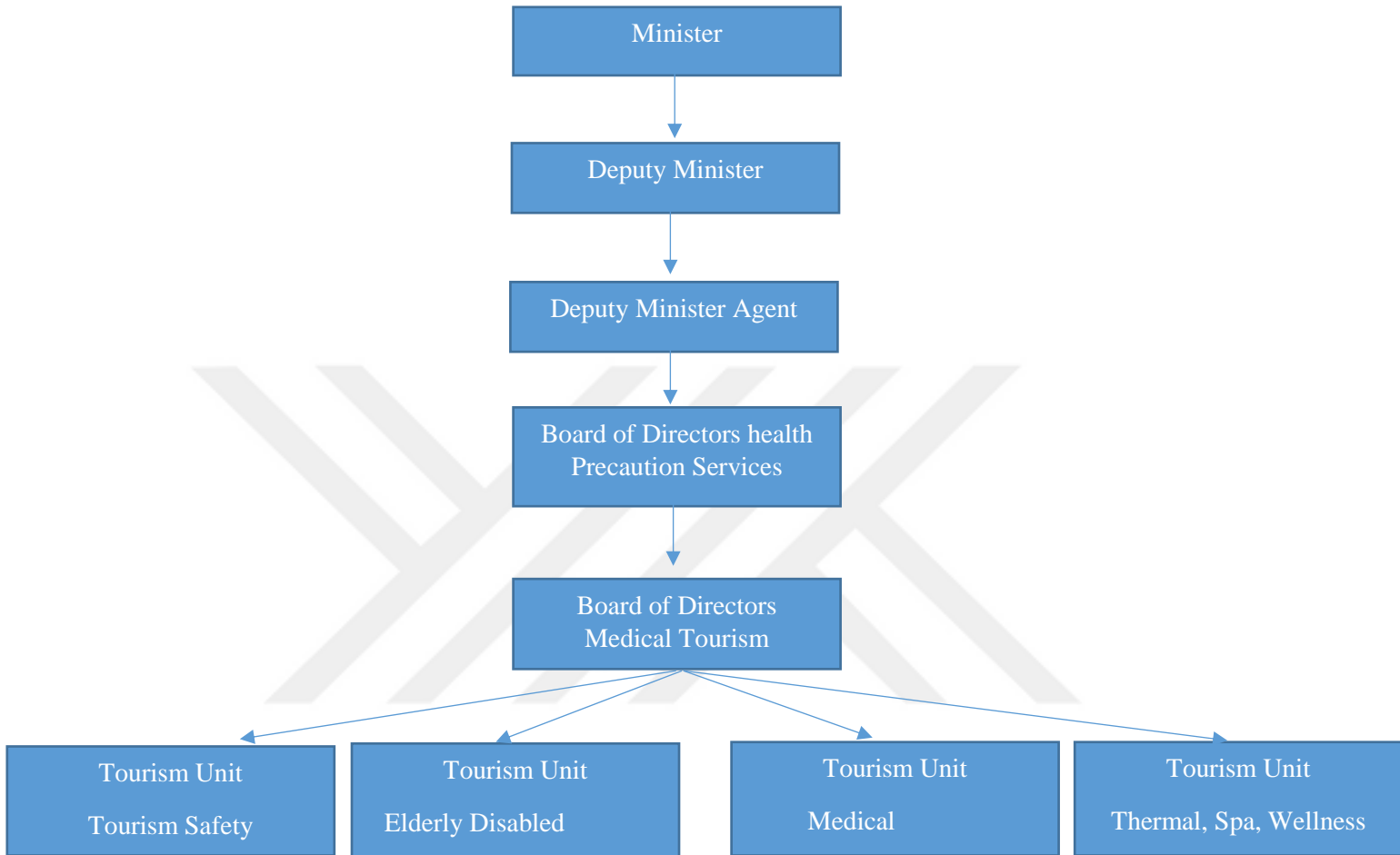
According to Altin (2012) this country enjoys unique potentialities for the development of health tourism such a geographical location, climatic conditions, hot water resources, natural beauty, transportation, medical manpower high quality of medical services. Turkey also enjoys a lot of privileges which makes it a very strong competitor in the area of medical tourism, spa and wellness tourism, elderly and disable tourism, sport tourism which attracts all people of all ages and all social classes. Another important reason for choosing Turkey as a medical tourism destination inside and outside the country is the reasonable prices of medical services offered by hospital in Turkey which is 45 to 65 percent cheaper than expenses for the same medical treatments given in the USA, Britain, and Germany Turkey Tourism Journal (2011).

According to Ministry of Health of Turkey (2013) the cities which most patients prefer for medical tourism in Turkey are Istanbul, Antalya, Ankara, Izmir, Mugla, Karaman, Aydin, Adana and Borsa among these, Antalya, Mugla and Aydin offer emergency treatments and Ankara, Izmir and Istanbul offer more comprehensive Medical services.

Turkey is decided to become one of the leading countries for medical tourism in the world by building high standards hospitals in many cities to achieve this goal, the health and medical organizations of the country is cooperating closely with governmental institutors, private sectors, go-between companies, and all those organizations which play a role in the development of medical tourism to attract more tourists for medical treatments.

According to Turkey's ministry of health, the administrative structure of medical tourism can be shown in the following diagram.

Figure 2: The administrative structure of medical tourism in Turkey



Source: Based on Turkey's Ministry of Health (2012)

As the table above shows Turkey's Board of Directors Medical Tourism has divided the 4 sub categories such as Tourism Safety, Tourism Elderly Disabled, Medical, Thermal and Spa and Wellness.

In order to develop and give variety to tourism in general and health tourism in particular and as a result the attraction of more tourists and bring in more money, Turkey's Ministry of Health (2012) planned to increase investment on the wellness and thermal resources, consequently attempts have been made by the government to build facilities like warm water hotels, wellness center and parks based on international standards also government's supports and regulations issuing license for health and wellness facilities like spas,

advertising and publicizing measurements, outside the country to attract more tourists by the government and private companies.

To sum up, it seems that Turkey enjoys almost all necessary conditions to become one of the most important leading countries in the arena of general tourism, health and wellness tourism and particularly medical tourism.

1.4.5. Singapore

According to ESCAP (2007) Singapore is considered as the one of leaders of Asian countries concerning Medical Tourism in Particular on the part of making use of advanced technological medical equipment and expert medical specialists who are in the list known as the Firsts. Singapore surgeons were the first who separated the twins from Nepal, they were the first who did the first percutaneous aortic valve replacement and they were also the firsts who of a rare ectopic pregnancy with a single incision exclusively through the belly button for the first time in Asia, this event has been proudly mentioned in Singapore's advertising of medical tourism regularly.

According to Hall (2013) the only problem that this country is faced with in competing with other pioneer countries in medical tourism is the high prices of medical services, since hospitals in India and Malaysia and Thailand are improving their conditions, it is probable that soon medical tourists choose these countries as their medical destinations. Therefore, for Singapore to be able to compete with Thailand and Malaysia, as two major rivals in Asia, Singapore must reduce medical expenses to some extent or offer lower prices to attract more patients.

Singapore is also famous for high standards, proficiency and instructional aspects in medical services and also enjoys high level of cleanliness of the environment in general and hospitals and medical centers in particular.

According to Hung et al (2011) Singapore privileges for getting into Asian competing arena of medical tourism and medical tourism attraction from all over the world are: high standard quality of medical services, and medical infrastructure reliability and international credibility.

1.4.6. Iran

From historical point of view , Iran a country of old times with an old civilization has been a health and medical destination since centuries ago, the existence of so many warm and hot water-springs all over the country with a variety of mineral and chemical characteristics having different levels of heat and warmth are witnesses for this claim.

Avecina (981-1037) the great Persian physician, scientist and philosopher who wrote the book of The Canon of Medicine, The Book of healing and many other books and worked in medical sciences puts the corner-stone of medical education in the Middle East universities and later his books were taught in European schools of medicine, studied the medical effects of these hot water-springs on human body and classed them according to chemical matters each one contained. Many temples and castles of ancient Persian kings were built close to these hot water-springs like Anahita's Temple in Takab and the castle of Ardashir the Sasanid king, at firoozabad in Shiraz providence. Over 800 mineral waters have been discovered so far in this country among which 370 have mineral hot waters Zargham (2002).

At modern times where many countries in the world have found health tourism industry which brings in money and creates jobs and there is a competition in the region, Iranian authorities are thinking how to develop and improve this industry. Some experts believe that Iran can become a serious competitor in the region very soon Shalbfian (2011).

According to Azizi (2015) Iran has improved its medical tourism industry to an acceptable level but there are more things to do concerning infrastructures, superstructures, medical technological advances, hospital conditions, medical services etc. Anyway Iran can attract many patients from neighboring countries. Iran's medical markets right now includes patients from countries like Iraq, Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain of Persian Gulf region some Common Wealth of Independent States (CIS), such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Iranian people who are emigrants of other countries, also some American and European patients come to Iran for particular treatments like beauty surgeries and barrenness.

Medical tourism destination availability in Iran are located in cities like Tehran, Shiraz, Tabriz, Qom, Isfahan, and Mashhad and recently in Kish Islands.

According to Rahbary and Akhavan (2011) patients from neighboring countries especially from United Arab Emirates of the Persian Gulf traveled to Iranian cities like Shiraz and Tabriz to receive medical services like body organs transplant, kidney, liver, ear, eye, and heart and brain operations since many years ago but an exact date cannot be indicated. The reason why they chose Iran for medical treatments might be because of easy travel, short distance to destinations, cultural closeness and language familiarity and sometimes because of family relations, in addition to low price hospitality and good quality of medical services.

One more important point concerning low prices of medical services is that Iran's currency had fallen to very low level when compared with other countries therefore more patients prefer Iran as medical destination even European and Americans have found Iran very beneficial for medical services; in addition to this , Iran now attracts more patients from neighboring and Asian countries.

According to Hassanpor and Azizi (2015) Iran has made great progress and improvements in medical in general since in the recent years, Iranian specialists have become famous worldwide.

1.4.7. Other Pioneer Countries in Medical Tourism

There are many other countries which have made great progress in health tourism and medical tourism industry like Colombia, Israel, Lithuania, The Philippines, United Arab Emirates, but countries like Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica and Mexico are in the process of taking measurements towards becoming medical tourism destinations, particularly in beautification and cosmetic surgeries. It is really beyond the time limitation of this research to continue what goes on in such countries regarding medical tourism industry; that is why the review of literature come to an end here.

CHAPTER TWO

A RESEARCH ON IRAN'S HEALTH TOURISM

2.1 Methodology

Since this research aims at describing and findings the weaknesses and strengths of medical tourism in Iran at present time, descriptive qualitative methodology was followed. The title of the research is also a good clue to indicate the type of research and the procedure for data collection and analysis. Qualitative research is usually depended on observation and interview with open-ended questions and interviewees answers a list of predesigned question freely, and subjectively instead of obligatory and objectively.

2.2. Purpose of the Study & Research Question

This research aims at gathering data about present situation of health tourism in Iran and will demonstrate the weaknesses (challenges) and strengths (potentialities) through a descriptive qualitative research method, to reach some reliable answers to research questions a list of fundamental interview questions, that are those which are more all over the world and will be designed to be used for the interviews with Iranian medical experts, hotel and hospitals authorities, government authorities and public sectors. The data collected through interviews and some library research will be submitted to content analysis, the results will be shown in tables and charts for discussions and conclusion.

From what has been said so far the following research question is raised:

“What are the weaknesses (challenges) and strengths (potentialities) of medical tourism in Iran at present time?”

2.3. Significance of the study

The results and findings of this research may be useful for the authorities and people in charge for medical tourism in public sector or private sector in Iran as well. On the other hand, since education and training in this field needs permanent upgrading of the

equipment and technology, and keeping the manpower involved in the field up-to-date professionally through on the job training courses, the understanding and awareness of the weaknesses and strengths concerning medical tourism will be of great help to meet and satisfy these objectives, all of which will affect the increase of the income of the country.

It is of high significance to find out what definitions have been given by researchers in the field and what contributions international and local organization have offered in this respect that can be exploited by interested parties who enjoy the benefits of the industry.

It is also interesting to review the critical views made on these definitions and categorization since some of those definitions and classification make a long list, only those which are more common and accepted as well will be explained, not in their exact words but in paraphrased and brief form.

2.4. Sample

8 people made the participants of the study as interviewees. One from the Gandhi Hotel-Hospital as the chief executive, two medical specialists from the same Hotel-Hospital, these three are from private sector, three other medical specialists from governmental sector (public sector), one hotel executive assistant manager from private sectors and one university professor, one the head of tourism department in Allame Tabataba-e University who is also a counselor member of Iran's Tourism Organization with more than 25 years teaching experience in field of tourism.

Table 2: Profile of the interviewees

Sector	Organization	Position	Number
Private	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gandhi Hotel-Hospital• Parsian Hotel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Jahangiri, CEO of Gandhi H.H• Dr. Pirouz Hashemi, Hair Transplantation Specialist in Gandhi H.H• Dr. Yeganeh, Orthopedically Specialist in Gandhi H.H• Assistant Executive Manager at Parsian Hotel	4
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Noor Clinic• Dey Clinic• Khanevadeh Clinic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Mojdehi, Eye Surgery Specialist• Beauty Surgery Specialist• Orthopedically Specialist	3
Tourism Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allame Tabataba-e University of Tehran	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Head of Tourism Department in Allame Tabataba-e University and member of council of Iran's Tourism Organization	1

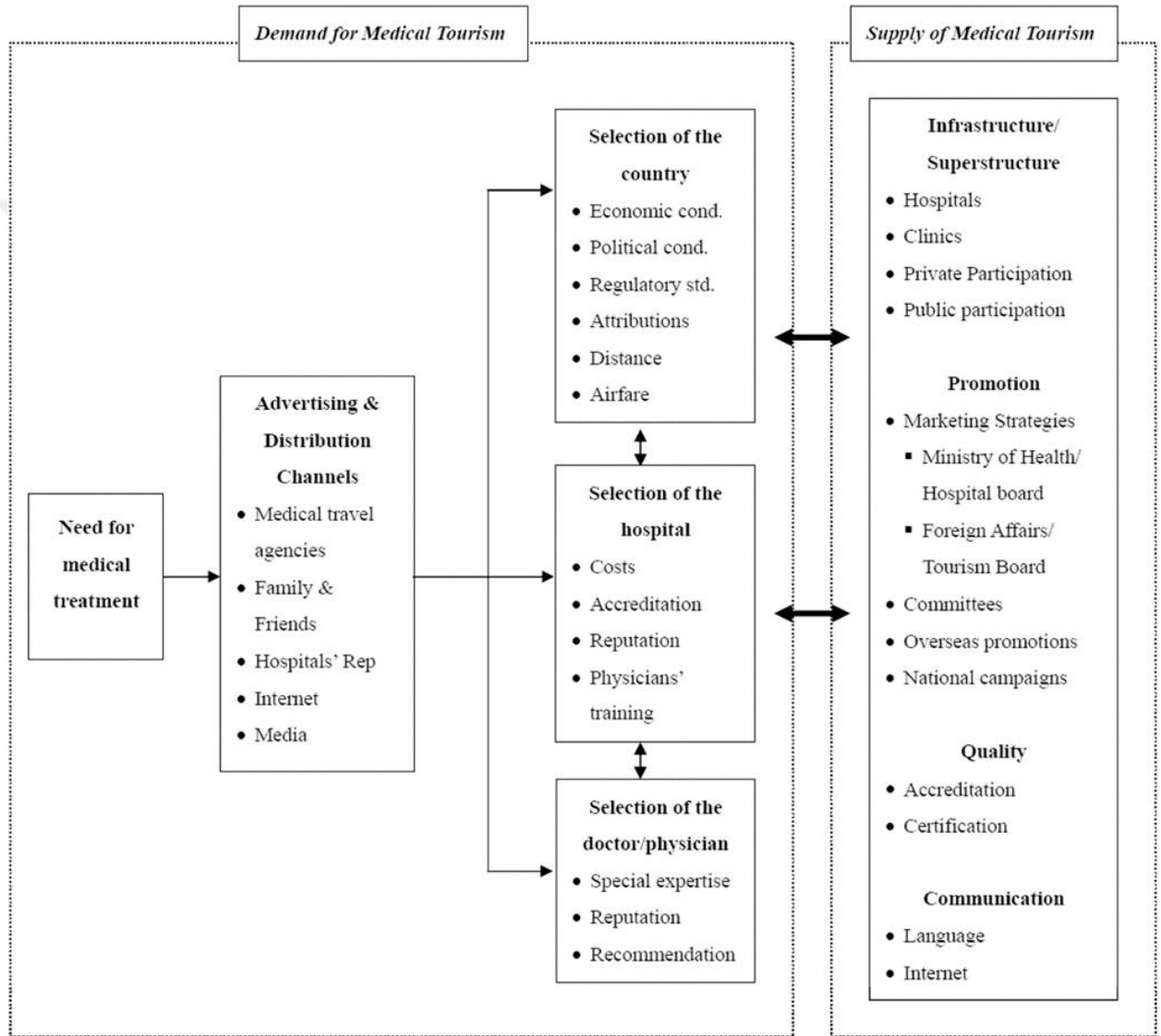
2.5. Research Instrument

To prepare the questions which is the main instrument for data collection in this study, the researcher extracted the key-issues in the field of medical tourism through an extensive review of literature covered in chapter one of this research and theoretical framework developed by Heung et al (2008). These key-issues made the foundation of the questionnaire based on the importance and logicity, and their frequency of usage in medical tourism research.

The conceptual model of supply and demand developed by Heung et al (2010) was used for data collection and analysis. Two significant parts can be seen in this model, logically the demands of the medical tourism system must come first because it indicates what the needs are, and then on the basis of need analysis, for successful medical tourism

management, the supply part is indicated, in other words the factors that have effects on choices of destinations and medical treatments are included in the demands part, and the measurements taken, satisfy the demands are the supply parts.

Table 3: A supply and demand model of medical tourism



Source: V.C.S. Heung et al. / Tourism Management 32 (2011)

2.6. Data Collection & Analysis

To collect data the researcher personally met with each participant separately for in-depth interviews and recorded their voices in Persian language which were later transcribed and translated into English by the researcher and a competent translator as editor. The interviewer performed the interviews, and asked the questions and audio-recorded the answers.

Each interview session took around 15 to 20 minutes. The translated version of the questions and responses can be seen in findings and discussion of the chapter two of this thesis. In order to rely on the validity of the responses, the key points of each interview were checked by the interviewees in another short meeting with them. All of them agreed on the validity of the content of the interviews.

To analyze the data, first the audiotaped interviews were transcribed and prepared for content analysis. The transcribed text were read carefully and also the notes taken during interviews were reviewed for the sake of identifying key words, phrases and concepts used in answers. The findings are based on the analysis of interviewees' responses.

2.6.1. Transcribed Interviews

DR. Jahangiri CEO of Gandhi Hotel-hospital, Private Sector

***Question 1:** Do you see IRAN as a serious competitor in Medical Tourism in Middle East?*

***Answer 1:** In my opinion Iran's competitors in the region are Turkey and India as neighboring countries, Turkey is now ahead of us because they have more experience in this field. India is also good, Lebanon has recently joined the field. Some Far-East Asian countries like Singapore and Thailand and Malaysia are also working very serious to attract more patients and Iran will soon reach a high position in Asia.*

Question 2: *What are the measurements that Iranian government needs to take to improve Medical Tourism in Iran?*

Answer 2: *Iran's government has involved five organization in M.T recently that they are ministry of health, cultural heritage organization, commerce chamber of Iran, ministry of foreign affairs. Their expert committees are working on evaluating the existed M.T conditions to plan short term and long term to improve the M.T now and in the future. So far we have not looked at M.T as serious as we should, but both government and private sectors are working hard to prepare for competition worldwide.*

Question 3: *Do you think that infrastructure and facilities are adequate for such tourism in IRAN?*

Answer 3: *Iran enjoys high potentialities but so far infrastructures and facilities have not been thought of by people in charge as a major and decisive factor, however, at present M.T facilities like hotel-hospitals and man power are reasonably OK. Although our medical specialists are among the best ones in the world, we are in need of training manpower to manage jobs like hoteling receiving patients and handicap transportations and translators. If we improve these preliminaries surely we can enter the competing market much better than what we are now.*

Question 4: *What are the factors that can boost up the M.T in IRAN? (In relation to officials, locals, privates, publics, investors, etc.)*

Answer 4: *We need more support from government although some governmental organization are helping M.T more forward faster, private sector must be persuaded to invest in M.T. Local people must be informed of the income that comes into the county and cultural attractions that patients from other nations may see in Iran. Officials may facilitate visa problems, visa and master and credit cards. Receiving patients warmly and kindly by people working in hospitals and hotels, Medical specialists and technicians are also important factors.*

Question 5: *Do you think that "hospital operators, medical participants and specialist" are best in their fields?*

Answer 5: *Our medical specialists in heart, brain, eye and other disease are the best in the world. This is a fact agreed by many experts in the field of M.T but I confess that we are not that strong in*

giving professionally service to patients, we have problems in hoteling and hospitals service, transportation from airport is a major problem. Nurses, operators are quite familiar with their jobs. Administrative need more training in M.T.

Question 6: *How the economic and political situation in Iran do affect M.T development?*

Answer 6: *Tourism in general and M.T in particular can bring in money for all countries which are professional in this field. Economic stability has two aspects sometimes it may be a positive factor and sometimes negative. Economic stability can help M.T because patients pay lower prices for better medical service financial competition is a positive point cheaper high quality medical treatments bring in more patients. Economic instability kills motivations; investors avoid investing on M.T, however things are getting better now.*

Political view of patients will never be an issue for them especially for foreigners, however promoting your religious view would not be a good idea to do in Iran.

Question 7: *What are the strength and weakness of M.T in Iran?*

Answer 7: *The strongest privilege that Iran has is the standards professionalism of the medical specialists. We have patients from USA, Europe, Arab countries who prefer Iran for the above reason, climate conditions, security prevailing the country, easy availability and cheaper prices and of course there are some weaknesses and short comings as well, technologically and logistically we need to improve. We are a little behind others in hard-ware factors. Visa, hoteling, transportation, and their related service that must be improved.*

Question 8: *What are the opportunities and threats to the local people?*

Answer 8: *Concerning threats and opportunities I can say there are more opportunities than threats in M.T for local people. There may be more job chances which means make more money for locals. Capacity and activities boost up to international levels and M.T patients spend three times more than a common tourist. Local people are usually involved in related jobs to M.T. threats are few in this industry, there might be some sanitary threats concerning special diseases which can be taken care by effective managing of affairs.*

Question 9: *Things that stop foreign patients to visit IRAN for medical purpose, in fact the reasons that convince tourists to avoid visiting Iran for medical intention.*

Answer 9: *Thing that may prevent patients to come to Iran for M.T is first of all bad propaganda against Iran because of ideology and politics. Particularly culture and religious rules like compulsory hijab for women and local people's attitude towards foreigners may be a problem. These problems can be removed by mass-media advertising out of the country by Iran's government. But it's very expensive for us and other private organizations to advertise overseas without help of government. The only thing that we can do is to make advertisement on some websites, therefore if we want to compete with others countries we must improve in M.T general service and to change the image of Iran in people's mind.*

Question 10: *Is there anything else that these questions have not covered regarding present situation of medical tourism in Iran?*

Answer 10: *As long as I know there are many Universities that offer Tourism and Hospitality management, also there are some institutes that offer tourism and branches of it in more advance level and shorter time, these course and classes are very effective to this industry because as I said our barriers and problems are more in basic and simple stuffs that can be done in short time to increase the industry and introducing it to society and government in a better way.*

Dr. Pirouz Hashemi, Specialists at Gandi Hotel-Hospital, Private Sector

Question 1: *Do you see IRAN as a serious competitor in Medical Tourism in Middle East?*

Answer 1: *Of course, 100 percent, Iran can compete with countries in the Middle East, Iran can even be the leader of M.T in the region because of so many natural geographical situations, climate conditions, hospitality of the people and highly expert man powers.*

Question 2: *What are the measurements that Iranian government needs to take to improve Medical Tourism in Iran?*

Answer 2:

- *The measurements that Iranian government must do are as follows:*
- *Better service for medical visas*
- *Better transportation and tours*
- *Better hoteling service and more equipped hospitals*
- *Persuading and supporting private sector to volunteer to invest in M.T*
- *Organizing exhibitions for people inside and outside of the country*
- *Introducing Iran's climatic and geographical conditions to attract more patients*
- *Advertising through media and websites*

Question 3: *Do you think that infrastructure and facilities are adequate for such tourism in IRAN?*

Answer 3: *We can say it is reasonably satisfactory but not enough. On the part of hospital facilities, we are OK. Regarding medical treatments and surgical capabilities Iran is one of the most advanced ones in the world. Concerning heart surgery, brain surgery, beauty surgery, eyes operations we are ahead of even European and America. For example for hair plant we have patients from Europe, North America and the patient just before your interview was from Ukraine, we also have good hospitals and good expert's man power both medical and administration.*

Question 4: *What are the factors that can boost up the M.T in IRAN? (In relation to officials, locals, privates, publics, investors, etc.)*

Answer 4:

- *Preparing better classification of duties for travel agencies with high credit level.*
- *Improving hoteling conditions to be able to compete with countries such as Turkey and Thailand.*

- *Language barrier is a problem that must be removed by employing competent translators in different languages not only English, French, German but Turkish, Arabic and Asian Languages as well.*
- *Having close ties with developing countries to share scientific information.*
- *Improving communication services outside the country like through IT programs advertising, exhibitions etc.*
- *Improving cultural attitude of the local people towards foreigners who come to Iran for medical treatments and tourism.*
- *Providing patients and their relatives with better visa facilities, transportation, city tours and other entertainments.*
- *Motivating private sectors to invest more in hotel-hospital buildings and bring in more advanced medical technology.*

Question 5: *Do you think that “hospital operators, medical participants and specialist” are best in their fields?*

Answer 5: *I can say a strong “YES”, in Iran medical centers and universities offer the most advanced and equipped health and hygienic courses of training. Most Iranian heart, brain, eye and beauty surgeons enjoy international fames. Hospital administrators and operators are chosen from among best ones, periodical on the job training for hospital operators and other service personnel’s are also offered.*

Question 6: *How the economic and political situation in Iran do affect M.T development?*

Answer 6: *Naturally economic y is very important in each country, but concerning ups and downs of currency does not affect our career as we bargain by Euro or Dollar not Iran’s currency. Good economic condition means better income for all, and job employment goes up. In medical tourism good economic condition means offering better service to patients, one serious problem is providing Visa-Card and Credit-Card service, although officials are working for its betterment.*

Question 7: *What are the strength and weakness of M.T in Iran?*

Answer 7: *The most important strength is Medical Tourism in Iran is the medical aspect. We have the best heart, brain, eye and other disease specialists who are famous all over the world. On the part of hoteling and hospitals, Turkey and Thailand have better conditions but some organizations like Health and Medical Ministry, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry, social welfare and insurance organization are involved to boost up medical tourism. There are some weaknesses as well, like transportation service from air-port to hospitals, lack of translators in patient's language, unfamiliarity of reception's cadre with how to receive foreign patients and in some cases leading some Shia patients to cities which are shrines or have historical interests like Mashhad and Shiraz and Isfahan in which medical service are not as good as Tehran, anyhow things are getting better day-by-day.*

Question 8: *What are the opportunities and threats to the local people?*

Answer 8: *Local people will have more job chances and more income.*

Iranian are famous for their hospitality, no particular threats exist to local people concerning medical tourism, there may be more chances for people to get familiar with people from other countries which cause to know their culture and traditions.

Question 9: *Things that stop foreign patients to visit IRAN for medical purpose, in fact the reasons that convince tourists to avoid visiting Iran for medical intention.*

Answer 9: *There may be many wrong propaganda against Iran concerning ideological or political likes or dislikes. There are also some certain regulation in the country like women's Hijab that may prevent patients to come to Iran from western countries. Anyway, when patients consider the high standard medical services and worldwide famous medical specialists available with low cost, they are more likely to come to Iran for this purpose.*

Question 10: *Is there anything else that these questions have not covered regarding present situation of medical tourism in Iran?*

Answer 10: *There are many organizations that aim to develop medical tourism that not only work in the field but they train volunteers from tourism majored students who are also working in this Hotel-Hospital as well, we need to keep these people as we need them most in the field and to keep by giving them more motivation and courage.*

Dr. Yeganeh, Specialist at Hotel-Hospital, Private Sector

Question 1: *Do you see IRAN as a serious competitor in Medical Tourism in Middle East?*

Answer 1: *Emirates and Turkey.*

Question 2: *What are the measurements that Iranian government needs to take to improve Medical Tourism in Iran?*

Answer 2: *The first thing was that Iranian government had to identify this industry that fortunately they did and the industry caught their eyes and they have stepped forward to develop this industry for example government has eased the T-visa for foreign patients and their family but important thing is the fear that are still existed in foreigners mind and to make the secure feeling for them that solving this will be a huge help to this industry because in the middle east I am sure that everybody believe that Iran is strong and powerful in the Medical stuffs and the other thing that government should solve is the money transfer facilitating which cause a lot of problem for patients and us.
(Iranian banks are not connected to the other banks outside of Iran due to the USA sanction but after lifting the sanction in 2016 this problem will more likely be solved in a shorter term).*

Question 3: Do you think that infrastructure and facilities are adequate for such tourism in IRAN?

Answer 3: It's not expert, we have the infrastructure and we have no problem in equipment or hospital and facilities but the only lack is the mismanagement between the organs and officials.

Question 4: What are the factors that can boost up the M.T in IRAN? (In relation to officials, locals, privates, publics, investors, etc.)

Answer 4: The first thing that should have been done was to get rid of the middlemen because patients will be passed from each middlemen to another until they get to the destination and this will make the patients feel not to trust, government have been trying to avoid these people in between in which that government have been hugely successful, ministry of health and other organization are united now to get rid of these matters to be managed and organized.

Question 5: Do you think that "hospital operators, medical participants and specialist" are best in their fields?

Answer 5: Our doctors and specialists are very expert on their fields, already we have patients from Europe, Asia and USA that would prefer to be treated in Iran because of our exports man power and specialist resources.

Question 6: How the economic and political situation in Iran do affect M.T development?

Answer 6: The currency change in Iran is not so alternate and the way that we deal with our patients is with USD or EUR, we will update our fees on our websites if there is any great change in the currency.

Question 7: *What are the strength and weakness of M.T in Iran?*

Answer 7: *As I Motioned before our doctors and all the human resources are the best in their own fields also our hospitals and equipment are the most up-to-dated in the world which are the biggest strengths in this industry. Also as I said before our weaknesses are lack of proper plan and mismanagement in the industry and also patients' rights.*

Question 8: *What are the opportunities and threats to the local people?*

Answer 8: *There is no threats but thousands of new jobs will come up to profit the local.*

Question 9: *Things that stop foreign patients to visit IRAN for medical purpose, in fact the reasons that convince tourists to avoid visiting Iran for medical intention.*

Answer 9:

- *Iranian rules and regulations for women, the bad image if Iran in the world, lack of advertisement abroad etc.*
- *Advertisement is not sufficient.*
- *The image of Iran is still not very good in westerns mind that will abatement the number. Of whole tourists and general due to wrong propaganda.*
- *The law of Islamic Republic of Iran I terms of women's Hijab (for example Turkey's advertisement on media is very attractive to people which our rules and regulation does not permit us to do it so).*

Question 10: *Is there anything else that these questions have not covered regarding present situation of medical tourism in Iran?*

Answer 10: *Here in the Gandi Hotel-Hospital there are several students from medical and tourism major that work and do their internship here to gain experience and to feel the combination of medical and tourism majors in real life, one other element that can help our industry is to send these people in overseas to gain more international experiences because they will contact more foreign patients than local.*

Hotel Parsian Azadi's Executive Assistant Manager, Private Sector

Question 1: *Do you see IRAN as a serious competitor in Medical Tourism in Middle East?*

Answer 1: *I'm not a good resource to answer this question but as far as I know Turkey is the best in the region, also Emirate is very good in hoteling and infrastructure part*

Question 2: *What are the measurements that Iranian government needs to take to improve Medical Tourism in Iran?*

Answer 2: *The thing that Iranian government should consider is the hoteling part and transportation from airport to hotels. Currently after the Iran's nuclear deal we are facing overcrowded hotels and over-booking, the other important thing that government should do is to promote online website and online booking. Also the advertisement in other countries media and introducing our new build hotels again in targeted countries.*

Question 3: *Do you think that infrastructure and facilities are adequate for such tourism in Iran?*

Answer 3: *The whole structure and infrastructure in Iran is very old and it's not even near international standards, as I mentioned in answer 1 we need at least 50 to 70 new hotels in Tehran and at least 20-30 in each other big cities.*

Also banking transaction should be installed as soon as possible to avoid old dated exchanging money.

Question 4: *What are the factors that can boost up the M.T in IRAN? (In relation to officials, locals, privates, publics, investors, etc.)*

Answer 4: *As far as I know our Doctors and specialists are very high educated and very high experienced in many medical fields but the issue that has avoided Iran's MT to be the best of itself*

is the contribution of private sectors, if we can allow international and domestic private firms to contribute in the market many of the issues will be solved, because it profits both parts (government and private) in a country isolated from the outside world for decades this would be a great help for people socialize with people from other countries and grow their knowledge about the whole world and different people.

Question 5: *Do you think that “hospital operators, medical participants and specialist” are best in their fields?*

Answer 5: *In my opinion as a hotelier the infrastructure of building of the hospitals are really outdated, but the thing that highlights my answer is the doctors and specialists that have studied in best universities abroad and are really famous worldwide.*

Question 6: *How the economic and political situation in Iran do affect M.T development?*

Answer 6: *Surprisingly the economic situation in Iran is stable and does not affect the medical tourism so much, but at the end being stable in economic will have its own positive and negative sides which can affect the not only tourism industry but other industries as well.*

Question 7: *What are the strength and weakness of M.T in Iran?*

Answer 7: *In my opinion the manpower, tourism attractions, and the geographical location of Iran are among the top strengths and as weaknesses we should consider the transportation, standardizing the hospitals and clinic and hotels to reach the level of other countries in the region to last in the competition.*

Question 8: *What are the opportunities and threats to the local people?*

Answer 8: *There is no threat for such an industry at all because in this industry contacting out people with foreigners as I said before will educate our people about the other cultures and different traditions and religion, also it bring foreign currency and hundreds of job and opportunities for youths.*

Question 9: *Things that stop foreign patients to visit IRAN for medical purpose, in fact the reasons that convince tourists to avoid visiting Iran for medical intention.*

Answer 9: *The bad image of Iran that media has created is the biggest issue that still stops tourists to visit Iran and medical tourism is not an expectation from this crises, the only profitable thing that we should do is to introduce Iran as what truly is and advertise in abroad TV and channels and radios and all medias.*

Question 10: *Is there anything else that these questions have not covered regarding present situation of medical tourism in Iran?*

Answer 10: *I think your questions covered almost all important spots.*

Dr. Aliasghar Rezaie, Beauty Surgery Specialist, Dey Clinic, Public Sector

Question 1: *Do you see IRAN as a serious competitor in Medical Tourism in Middle East?*

Answer 1: *Iran has got huge potential in tourism industry as general, Medical tourism's potential in Iran is very massive as one of the subset of tourism industry in general. Your answer is of course Iran is having a big role in this industry in the region.*

Question 2: *What are the measurements that Iranian government needs to take to improve Medical Tourism in Iran?*

Answer 2: *The things that government should measure is to bring more private sectors, as many foreign company as possible, fixing the banking problem as soon as possible, advertisement online in the overseas and targeting the countries we should work on, supporting private sector and facilitating E-via and VOA visa.*

Question 3: *Do you think that infrastructure and facilities are adequate for such tourism in IRAN?*

Answer 3: *Your answer is of course not. The infrastructure and equipment to meet the international standards are nor even close to what it should be, but currently Iranian government has done a few step to start this huge potential and build several places related to medical tourism.*

Question 4: *What are the factors that can boost up the M.T in IRAN?*

Answer 4: *As I mentioned in the question No 1, there are many factors that would boost up Iranian Medical tourism, which some should be taken by government and others by the private sectors, after the Iran's Nuclear deal with 5+1 powers of the world, statistically tourism industry experienced a huge bounce, Iranian government should have a long term and short term plan and using the best strategy to be more active in the domestic and international markets.*

Locals are needed to be more educated about this tourism industry and this is again government's job to produce environment for local to benefit from it and have more knowledge of the whole concept.

Question 5: *Do you think that "hospital operators, medical participants and specialist" are best in their fields?*

Answer 5: *I would clearly mention that our specialists in heart, brain, eye, hair implantation, beauty surgery are among the best in the world some of them are even in higher standards than European specialists and American. We have patients from all the over the worlds that despite of all the obstacle they visit Iran only for their doctors' specialty and skills.*

Question 6: *the economic and political situation*

Answer 6: *Economically Iran has been stable after 2009 and there has not been huge ups and down in the currency, but economically talking about this matter would be very vast, but as long as you want to know, economic changes could have positive result and negative as well for example if the currency collapse, then the cost of visiting Iran for foreign patients would be ever cheaper than*

what is cheap already now and as result there will be more tourists visiting Iran but at the same time locals life will affect negative, so this topic will be very deep and will not be very related to MT at this moment, but as for now, we are actually dealing in USD or Euro which does not have so much ups and down.

Question 7: *What are the strength and weakness of M.T in Iran?*

Answer 7: *In my Idea the weakness are way more than strengths, for example transportation, patients right, logistic part, management, planning, strategies are the weaknesses of Iran's Mt, and as strength our human resource who are consider as specialists, geographical, climate conditions, and other tourism attractions are our strengthens.*

Question 8: *What are the opportunities and threats to the local people?*

Answer 8: *Personally I would think there is no any threads for local people but there will be thousands of opportunity and entrepreneurship for local.*

Question 9: *Things that stop foreign patients to visit IRAN for medical purpose, in fact the reasons that convince tourists to avoid visiting Iran for medical intention.*

Answer 9: *The propaganda against Iran after the Islamic revolution in Iran from west had made the image of Iran as a scary country which is totally opposite and should be reimaged in the mind of foreigners especially after the Iran's nuclear deal with 5+1 powers of the world.*

Other domestic thing that would keep the tourists out of Iran would be obligatory Hijab which for westerns would not find it comfortable.

Question 10: *Is there anything else that these questions have not covered regarding present situation of medical tourism in Iran?*

Answer 10: *Unfortunately there is no college or University in Iran that specifically aim to Medical Tourism, I believe that Iran can do more in this industry as general and in medical tourism, to*

achieve to a very satisfying level, we need many factors and my dream is to improve day by day and show the real image of Iran to the world.

Dr. Babak Karimi, Orthopedic Specialist, Public Sector Clinic

Question 1: *Do you see IRAN as a serious competitor in Medical Tourism in Middle East?*

Answer 1: *I see Iran's potential way higher than our region but as for now, we are using approximately 20% of our real potential due to political reasons, but that 20% has still kept us in the competition in the Middle East.*

Question 2: *What are the measurements that Iranian government needs to take to improve Medical Tourism in Iran?*

Answer 2: *Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of health and science have made a mutual organization under Iranian government that combined the two sectors as one of the first few steps forward to reach to the goals in long term and as short term, facilitating the online visa and VOA visa for the patients and their family.*

Iranian government has also brought a few companies from overseas that are not even near the satisfying number but it because this field is becoming more known and accepted after the Iran's deal. There are not much thing done by government to easing the way of using credit cards, and visa and master, but government has promised to fix this huge problem until June 2017.

Question 3: *Do you think that infrastructure and facilities are adequate for such tourism in IRAN?*

Answer 3: *The infrastructure and tools and equipment for an ideal medical tourism in Iran are very low and not satisfying at all, although there a few internationally-standards hotel-hospital*

within the big cities but compare to the neighboring countries and developing countries there many lack which government should take care of them.

Question 4: *What are the factors that can boost up the M.T in IRAN? (In relation to officials, locals, privates, publics, investors, etc.)*

Answer 4: *The factors that can boost up the tourism and medical tourism are mentioned bellow as, private investment, advertisement, marketing, strategies and plan, inviting companies from overseas, exhibitions and etc.*

Question 5: *Do you think that “hospital operators, medical participants and specialist” are best in their fields?*

Answer 5: *It is not my word but many other officials have announced that Iran is very powerful in specialists and doctors, many of us have studied in European and American universities and have proved the skills in highest levels, I am definitely sure that manpower in Iran is one of the best in the world.*

Question 6: *How the economic and political situation in Iran do affect M.T development?*

Answer 6: *my answer is very simple the more medical tourism improve the more local's situation will improve, and in aspect of Iran's economic I shall say that for long time Iran's economic has been stable.*

Question 7: *What are the strength and weakness of M.T in Iran?*

Answer 7: *Weakness are many for example, the rules and regulation of women's Hijab is one of the most important weaknesses also infrastructure and transportation; and as strengths I would say the geographical location, climatic situation, hospitality of locals, and manpower.*

Question 8: *What are the opportunities and threats to the local people?*

Answer 8: *I never heard of threats to local or the culture from medical tourism but the opportunities are vast, making new jobs, bringing foreign currency to the country, introducing Iran's new image for other tourism types etc.*

Question 9: *Things that stop foreign patients to visit IRAN for medical purpose, in fact the reasons that convince tourists to avoid visiting Iran for medical intention.*

Answer 9: *Unfortunately the western media has been against Iranian government policy for almost 4 decades and the effect on peoples mind are undeniable, the image of Iran is related to the Iranian government policy and to change it, will take great effort.*

Question 10: *Is there anything else that these questions have not covered regarding present situation of medical tourism in Iran?*

Answer 10: *I think you should always have the politics of a country in your mind, Iranian politic is the biggest barrier to improve such an industry.*

Dr. Mojdehi, Specialist in Eye Surgery, Noor Public Clinic

Question 1: *Do you see IRAN as a serious competitor in Medical Tourism in Middle East?*

Answer 1: *I see Iran as a biggest threat to other countries' tourism industry as whole and not only in medical tourism, and they should not underestimate this potential of Iran.*

Question 2: *What are the measurements that Iranian government needs to take to improve Medical Tourism in Iran?*

Answer 2: *Letting the private sector in the arena and also and more importantly letting the foreign private sector and company to participate.*

Question 3: *Do you think that infrastructure and facilities are adequate for such tourism in IRAN?*

Answer 3: *The answer of this question is obviously a big no but regarding the number of patients is yes, if we are planning to improve the industry in serious way, then we should also think of our infrastructure very seriously too.*

Question 4: *What are the factors that can boost up the M.T in IRAN? (In relation to officials, locals, privates, publics, investors, etc.)*

Answer 4: *As I mentioned before, the foreign private sector, online advertisement in neighboring countries, T.V commercial and joining in international exhibitions are a few of the factor to boost up the industry.*

Question 5: *Do you think that “hospital operators, medical participants and specialist” are best in their fields?*

Answer 5: *As a person who studied abroad I would say not only us but those specialists that studied in Iranian universities are also among the top ones in the world and this is proven by their works and jobs.*

Question 6: *How the economic and political situation Iran do affect M.T development?*

Answer 6: *Political stability of Iran has always been a stable highlight within the country and the color of your mind (political idea) at least for a foreigner never will be interested, I think it's a very mutual concept because if the tourism industry improve then it helps the economic and if the economic improve then it helps the tourism industry to do with more speed and more facilities and equipment.*

Question 7: *What are the strength and weakness of M.T in Iran?*

Answer 7: *Mismanagement, government's law, and lack of advertisement are the weaknesses and specialists and manpower, location of the country and reasonable price of medical treatments are the strengths.*

Question 8: *What are the opportunities and threats to the local people?*

Answer 8: *Many jobs will be created, in long term also we will see our hospitals and specialists are increased in number and this help the country is crises, but I don't think of any threats.*

Question 9: *Things that stop foreign patients to visit IRAN for medical purpose, in fact the reasons that convince tourists to avoid visiting Iran for medical intention.*

Answer 9: *The image of Iran in international views, hearing always awful news from Iran and never the good news and good parts, I have to say that it is like an unfair battle because we can't ignore the role of western media that is always against Iran because of Iranian government policy so one of the things that stops patients and even normal tourists to visit our country is the western media.*

Question 10: *Is there anything else that these questions have not covered regarding present situation of medical tourism in Iran?*

Answer 10: *No, thank you*

*Dr. Mehdi Karoubi, Head of Tourism Industry, Tabataba-e University of Tehran,
Medical & Tourism Body*

Question 1: *Do you see IRAN as a serious competitor in Medical Tourism in Middle East?*

Answer 1: *In my view Iran is playing big part of competition in the region, plus the potential of Iran in Medical Tourism from aspect of Geography and attractions are deniable.*

Question 2: *What are the measurements that Iranian government needs to take to improve Medical Tourism in Iran?*

Answer 2: *Iran's officials have carried out some measurements like improvement of hospitals facilities and medical treatments for foreigner as part of governmental consideration. No support by government is given to private sector. If government does not interfere in private hospitals and hotel-hospitals, they can improve their Medical Tourism to international standards. Right now we have hospitals Like Parsian Hospital, Atiyeh Hospital, and Bahman Hospital which have medical and hotel cares receptions only for foreigner patients. They enjoy almost international standards level. Iran's officials must plan long and short term programs for improvement of MT by inviting foreign companies to invest on MT and also have to program for common tourism as well.*

Question 3: *Do you think that infrastructure and facilities are adequate for such tourism in IRAN?*

Answer 3: *What we have right now is reasonably acceptable but there is long way to get to international levels. As I said on the part of medical specialist we are among the best, but on the part of facilities like hoteling, transportation, advertisement we need to work harder. In the center of provinces like Shiraz, Mashhad, Tabriz, our specialists are wonderful in their own field like liver implantation, eye surgery they enjoy worldwide fame. Facilities like hoteling, Visa problems, credit card need improvement*

Question 4: *What are the factors that can boost up the M.T in IRAN? (In relation to officials, locals, privates, publics, investors, etc.)*

Answer 4: *There are factors such as lack of credit cards, lack of visa cards lack of online hotel booking, and logistic problems, so of which must be solved by the government and some of them by the private sectors. Private sectors must value for investing on MT and government must support them. Local people must come culturally to change some old attitudes and cooperate through good behaviors, kindness, and more hospitality.*

Question 5: Do you think that “hospital operators, medical participants and specialist” are best in their fields?

Answer 5: Of course we are ok, our medical specialists, hospital operators and medical teams are among the best in the world. In heart surgery we are even ahead of rivals like Thailand and Malaysia. And as I said before our human resource in the Mt are very professional and specialists.

Question 6: How the economic and political situation in Iran do affect M.T development?

Answer 6: Economic situation in Iran because of rich natural resources never get really critical, it's to understand the importance of MT by officials and investors to co-operate in this field. Government should persuade foreign companies and private sectors to invest money in boosting the MT in Iran, also political situation is really stable, and there is no political issue within the country to bother such a money-making industry.

Question 7: What are the strength and weakness of M.T in Iran?

Answer 7: The strong point in Iran's MT, is the specialists and experiences of our medical teams who enjoy international reputations we are proud of them. Geographical situation, climate conditions attract more patients day by day, people's hospitality and their kindness towards tourists and patients also the historical interests are also other positive factors to attract not only MT but general tourists as well.

The weaknesses are mostly related to accommodation, transportation, unfamiliarity with receptions of patients, money exchange, credit cards, visa cards and etc, which can be solved by better managing and training.

Question 8: What are the opportunities and threats to the local people?

Answer 8: Chances are more for job improvements and employments for local people. There is no particular threats for them. People's international culture goes up when they are in company of other nations.

Question 9: *Things that stop foreign patients to visit Iran for medical purpose, in fact the reasons that convince tourists to avoid visiting Iran for medical intention.*

Answer 9: *There may be bad propaganda against our country. Ideological attitudes and religious regulations like Hijab, maybe a hindrance advertisement is very weak. We need more advertising outside of the country.*

Question 10: *Is there anything else that these questions have not covered regarding present situation of medical tourism in Iran?*

Answer 10: *I think your questions already covered all but the only thing I would add is that medical tourism need more professional people in management and organizing part which they have to be taught professionally to handle and solve the issues in expert ways.*

2.6.2. Analysis and Results of the Interviews

The content analysis results revealed that particular themes which were categorized and supported by related sub-categories, the categorization and sub-categorization that were identified are listed in detailed in table 3, these themes were extracted through their frequency in the responses of the interviewees. The opinions expressed by each group of the responses of course to avoid confusion and interferences of the theme item and sub-categories, two tables were needed, one showing items of weaknesses and another for showing strengths.

Table 4: Results of content analysis and group comparison (Weaknesses)

Themes	Sub-Categories	Public	Private	Medical and Tourism Bodies
Quality of Services	- Lack of high quality service offered in hospitals	2	1	0
	- Lack of technological equipment in most of the hospitals	1	2	0
International Creditability	- Lack of international accreditation and licenses	1	1	1
Transportation & Aviation	- Lack of systematic plan of transportation and aviation	2	0	1
	- Lack of equipped and new aircrafts	2	0	1
Banking, Master and Visa cards	- Visa, Master Problem	2	1	1
	- Lack of transferring money	2	2	2
Cultural differences	- Like Compulsory Hijab	3	2	1
Government Marketing Strategy	- Lack of Advertisement abroad (TV, Radio, Exhibitions)	2	2	1
	- Long list of waiting for Visa	3	2	1

Table 5: Results of content analysis and group comparison (Strengths)

Themes	Sub-Categories	Public	Private	Medical and Tourism Bodies
Medical Specialists & manpower	- Iranian Specialists enjoy international fame	4	3	1
	- Iran is a serious competitor in this regard	4	3	1
Economy	- Patients choose Iran because of low prices of	1	0	0
Geographical	- Iran enjoys Four full season and good climatic conditions	2	2	1
	- Tourism Attractions	2	1	1
Political & securities	- Iran enjoy political stability and very high internal security	1	1	1
Infrastructure & Superstructure	- Government is Inviting Private sector for investing (domestic and International)	0	0	1
Cultural	- Iranian people hospitality is well known in the world	1	1	1

To find the answer to the research question, all responses started by the three groups of the interviewees were put into quantification computation by means of ranking of the number of responses related to each theme and frequency count of each theme, therefore not only the weakness factors and strength factors were indicated but also their ranks were identified. The results are shown in the table 6.

Through content analysis of the transcript of the interviewee's audiotapes and then item analysis and preparation of lists containing similar answers provided by interviewees under key-issue headings common in medical tourism internationally the research came up with the following results: The items in two columns were extracted through close analysis of the answers by the interviews.

Table 6: Ranking of the answers from 1 to 10

WEAKNESSES	RANK	STRENGTHNESSES	RANK
Low quality of facility and reception services and lack of technological equipment in most of the hospitals	4	Skillful experienced medical specialists with international fame	10
Lack of aviation and transportation infrastructure	4	Political stability and internal security	4
Problems with medical visa issuing	8	Low medical expenses	1
Lack of money transferring and credit cards	7.5	People hospitality and kindness	4
No program for advertisement abroad	7	Suitable geographical situation	7
Preventing cultural or religious beliefs like compulsory Hijab	8	Comparing Iran as a serious competitor in the region	10

2.7. Findings and Discussions

As it was mentioned, previously the researcher took Heung et al (2010) *model of Demand and Supply of Medical Tourism* in Table 3, into consideration as basis to be compared with the results found through descriptive, qualitative research. Therefore, in comparing the findings with Heung's model we see on the demand side of the model first there is the key-term *advertising and distribution channels* as an important element in

medical tourism marketing and attraction. All eight participants agreed that it is one the major weaknesses in Iran's medical tourism.

Secondly, concerning the sounding heading of *selection of the country by patients* regarding the elements in the subcategories under this heading, the content analysis showed that Iran is good in items of distance from neighboring countries, airfare, political and economic conditions and attributions but weak in items of regulatory.

Third, there is *the selection of the hospital*, in Heung's model under which are subcategory-items of costs, accreditation, reputation and physician training content and item analysis regarding items of costs, reputation and physicians' training. Iran enjoys a high level compared with other countries in the region but on the item of accreditation and licenses, Iran is very weak.

The fourth heading in the demand section is *selection of the medical doctor or doctor physician* under which are the items of special expertise, reputation and recommendation which in all of them Iran is famous world widely, this has been agreed by the eight participants' responses, therefore Iran can be a qualified competitor in Asia and the region in this respect.

On the supply section of Heung et al (2010) there exist four other major headings which we numbered them fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth order of location within the map of the model.

The fifth heading shows a very important one that is the infrastructure and superstructure that its subcategories are: *hospitals, clinics, private participation, and public participations*. Within these categories when we compare the responses of the participants, it is perceived that hospitals and clinics in Iran are not classed as 5 or 4 stars but are reasonably acceptable, and that the private participation is not that supported or if it is, there are a lot of control and interferences that cause disappointment of private sector but there are long term projects of infrastructures in future comprehensive plan of the countries, development regarding the sixth major headings category which is *promotion* the subcategories of marketing strategies the organization of ministry of health, hospital boards, foreign affairs are cooperating but not that satisfying although they have plans for future

development of medical tourism as the authorities believe Iran can become the center of medical tourism in Asia during ten or fifteen coming years.

To consider the seventh heading major categories of supply we have the key-term quality in which two subcategories exist, *accreditation and certification*. Responses of participants confirmed the lack of these two within present conditions of hospitals in Iran but recently some private hospitals like Parsian, Bahman, Atiyeh and Gandi's Hotel-Hospital have improved their medical services to almost international standard level and they are receiving patients from neighboring countries and Arab countries right now.

Last but not least there exist the eight heading of supply and categorization in Heung's et al model and the sub-categorization are *language and internet*, the participant's responses confirmed that Iran enjoys very good conditions concerning the existence of translators in international hospital either private or public and there are websites belonging to hospitals and administrative involve in medical tourism activities in Iran.

2.7.1. Conclusion and Implications

The aim of this study was to determine the weaknesses and strengths of the medical tourism in Iran through a descriptive qualitative research, the findings of the research revealed a list of weaknesses and strengths which exist in medical tourism in Iran. A close look at these two lists clearly indicates that Iran enjoys *low costs for medical services offered in private or public hospitals, skillful and experienced medical teams* who are famous worldwide are working in Iran's hospitals and that *short distance from neighboring countries and central Asian countries, low airfare to fly to Iran and also peoples hospitality and political stability and internal security , suitable geographical location* all are of positive (strengths) points about Iran's situation of medical tourism in Iran.

There is a list of weaknesses regarding medical tourism of Iran which includes issues like:

lack of systematic strategies and poor management in medical tourism, lack of enough support of authorities of private sectors, lack of accreditation of hospitals and medical

centers, problems with money transferring and medical visa issue, aviation and transportation problem, low standards of some medical technology, low level of hotel services and lack of international hotel licenses, weak advertising and marketing, are all among the weaknesses with Iran's present situation of medical tourism.

Taken all these elements into consideration confirmed that Iran has a long way to go to reach the standards which are essential to be able to compete with other countries in Asia like Singapore, Turkey, India, Thailand at present time, but experts opinions of the participants of this study foresee a bright future for Iran's medical tourism if authorities try to make short-term and long-term plans of infrastructures and superstructures for medical tourism counting on Iran's potentialities in this respect.

2.7.2. Educational Managerial Implications

The findings of this study research can significantly help the key players in medical tourism industry in Iran or other countries having this industry. From educational point of view students in tourism studying in general and those involved in teaching and learning medical tourism can benefit from the finding of this research. Material developers in medical tourism training can make use of the findings of the present reach in educational material writing, curriculum and syllabus designing and also these people who like to choose a medical destination for themselves, relatives and friends may find the results of this research useful as well.

2.8. Suggestions for Further Research

Some students of medical tourism may replicate this research to find out if the same finding can be gotten or not.

The participants of this study were small in number, other researcher may rely on a larger number and replicate the study

Some researchers may be interested in choosing a topic based on the pull and push motivational theory Zhang (2008) on the part of patients selecting a destination country or medical matters.

Some researcher may think about the factors which must be put on hospitals websites for the information of patients and others.

2.9. Limitations of the Research

There are limitations and delimitations in all researches and this study has some limitations which hindered the movement of the new work to some extent. First came up the choosing of the topic which was too broad, at first it was “Medical Tourism in Iran, present situation and future perspective” but logically thinking this was almost impossible to do because of barriers existed on the way of data collection therefore, the topic of thesis was changed and narrowed down to “Weaknesses and Strengths of Medical Tourism in Iran”, the second limitation was because of the exploratory nature of this study which is qualitative research with no previous list of items for preparation of the questionnaire, therefore, the researcher delimit this problem by a comprehensive reviewing of the related literature to prepare items for the questions.

The third limitation emerged deciding to choose participants from different organization involved in medical tourism, because rarely people were ready to cooperate with the research to become a participant, as a result the researcher had to limit himself to a small number of participants (eight people only). There was also problems with taking trips to other provinces other than Tehran, this also forced the researcher to do the research only with participants in Tehran. Anyway cares were taken in collecting data through reliable sources.

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Appendix 1.

Interview Questions:

1. Do you see Iran as a serious competitor in Medical Tourism in Middle East?
2. What are the measurements that Iranian government needs to take to improve Medical Tourism in Iran?
3. Do you think that infrastructure and facilities are adequate for such tourism in Iran?
4. What are the factors that can boost up the M.T in Iran? (In relation to officials, locals, privates, publics, investors, etc.)
5. Do you think that “hospital operators, medical participants and specialist” are best in their fields?
6. How the economic situation in Iran do affect M.T development?
7. What are the strength and weakness of M.T in Iran?
8. What are the opportunities and threats to the local people?
9. Things that stop foreign patients to visit Iran for medical purpose, in fact the reasons that convince tourists to avoid visiting Iran for medical intention.
10. Is there anything else that these questions have not covered regarding present situation of medical tourism in Iran?