

# A Knowledge Management Model Applied to Health Tourism in Colombia

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**Abstract.** Health tourism is an emerging sector in many countries, where developing economies find an opportunity to grow by providing quality medical services at competitive prices. The proposed model is applied to Knowledge Management and is also based on Medical Tourism from the perspective of Information and Communications Technology – ICT. This model represents a fundamental tool for achieving competitive tourism worldwide and for improving decision-making in the industry, since the fundamental weaknesses of such an industry are related to information-wise aspects, value and reliability when transferring knowledge. This management model provides a guide to achieve these objectives through the establishment of tools for its implementation.

## 1 Introduction

Human beings have always wanted to improve their quality of life and keep their welfare. Developments of social cultural and economic aspects of human health have occurred recently, leading to other kinds of developments in areas like medicine, technology, industry and tourism. Due to these developments and also due to factors like cost, transport, quality and medical security – all these related to surgical and medical procedures – there has been an increase in the number of potential patients that are willing to travel to different countries where the conditions to receive suitable medical treatments are a lot more favorable than in their own countries. This social phenomenon has been called “health tourism”, and constitutes an activity that is now considered to be of great economic value within the services industry worldwide, having regional leading countries in the field, such as India, Thailand, Mexico and Brazil.

Health tourism, also known as medical tourism, is still not as popular in Colombia, but its potential growth is significant. This is why official bodies like the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism and also the regional Chambers

of Commerce – among others – are drawing their attention to the growth of this new market, encouraging investment projects that allow consolidation and creation of competitive levels of service with respect to other leading countries in this sector.

The National Planning Department issued an official document titled CONPES 3678 [1] in 2010, where the Productive Transformation Program (PTP) was established as a public-and-private strategy to consolidate eight world-class sectors and promote economic growth. Among these eight world-class sectors, both health and tourism were included.

The absence of a Knowledge Management model limits the transfer of knowledge and experiences between the people involved in the development of Health Tourism. The lack of a suitable model also hinders decision-making and prevents participants from easily achieving highly competitive levels of service that compare with those offered in world-leading countries.

## **2 Health Tourism General Aspects**

An internationally accepted definition of health tourism states that it is “the process in which a person travels abroad for the purpose of receiving either health or welfare-associated services” [2].

Factors like high cost, long waiting lists in the local hospitals, access to new technologies and skills in the destination countries combined with low-costs transport and easy to access Internet-based marketing, have played a major role in the development of health tourism. Various Asian countries have taken the lead in this new market, but most of the other countries have also tried to participate [3].

### ***2.1 Different Categories of Health Tourism***

#### **2.1.1 Welfare**

In this category we find every activity that is aimed at improving people’s quality of life, achieving high levels of self-satisfaction in terms of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social health, regardless of any medical condition or vulnerability of the human body. These activities consider welfare from a health tourism viewpoint, which includes physical and recreational activities as well as specific practices that fulfill the same purpose.

#### **2.1.2 Aesthetic Medicine**

This category refers to all medical specialized practices that involve treatment and surgery in order to restore, maintain, and promote the beauty of the human body. Through aesthetic medicine, it is possible to prevent and treat all aesthetic pathologies. The purpose is to enhance physical features making them aesthetic and more beautiful; this also attempts to retard aging processes and promotes both physical and mental health of people.