



Dimensions of medical tourism clusters

Part 5. Five myths

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This **series of five brief articles** examines key aspects of clusters and other models that exist in the medical tourism sector. The first article focuses on the role of **definitions and data collection** in medical travel. The second article dissects the **definition of a cluster** to clarify the elements that constitute a true cluster as opposed to other models. In the third article, **two success stories**, Korea and Costa Rica, are examined in detail when the components of a cluster are applied to their organizational models. The fourth article reviews the **role of competition** within clusters. Finally in the fifth article, **five common myths** about medical tourism clusters are exposed.

The entire five articles comprise a white paper that can be [downloaded from the Medical Tourism Training website](#).

The medical tourism landscape is littered with clusters that have failed to launch or are underperforming.

There are various reasons why medical tourism clusters have not delivered their anticipated benefits. With the modern version of international medical travel services less than 20 years old, a certain amount of trial and error is to be expected as the market grows and changes. Certainly hype in the sector led to false expectations about what could be achieved quickly and for a modest budget.

Let's dispel a few common misconceptions to present a clearer picture about what medical clusters cannot and do not do.

Myth #1 - One size fits all.

There is no “one size fits all” model for the delivery of healthcare services and cluster development.



Looking at models and learning from the successes and failures in medical tourism and other industries is an excellent learning tool.

In Part Three of this series, Korea is offered as an example of a successful medical tourism cluster. The blue print for success in Korea cannot be taken wholesale and transplanted to another country or region.

Cluster development requires much more nuance and a thorough understanding of the entire economic, political, social, and geographic landscapes.

Myth #2 – Clusters will attract patients.

The mere formulation of a medical tourism cluster will not bring patients to your doorstep.

Patients are people and are attracted to certain cities, regions, or countries for specific reasons. Certain destinations around the world are perennially attractive. Other destinations are less popular or may be difficult to access. Building a state of the art hospital in an area that is not appealing, or is extremely difficult to get to will not make patients appear just because the destination is being promoted as a medical cluster.



Understanding what patients want and understanding what your geographic area offers may not result in a good match. Sometimes deciding not to pursue international patients is the best strategy.

Myth #3 – Clusters will succeed overnight.

The **complexity and cross-sectoral challenges** of developing and maintaining a healthy medical tourism cluster require **commitment** of financial, human, and political resources over **an extended period of time**.

Korea is an excellent example demonstrating the commitment to development of the medical tourism cluster. The country has made substantial investments in its cluster with a long term view to continued success. Korea has faced ups and downs in the market and remained steadfast, enjoying the successes to date and believing in the benefits in the future.



Results will not be apparent immediately. Participants may become disheartened and disengage from the process. The required level of long term commitment can be disrupted for many reasons: economic downturns, geopolitical disruption, lack of political will, weak leadership, and more.

Being willing to navigate the process over an indefinite period of time is the path to success.

Myth #4 – Clusters will compete for you.

Part Four of this five part series reviewed the role of competition in medical tourism clusters.



Cluster participants must differentiate themselves to successfully compete. There is **no place for a “me too” mentality** that is all too common in medical travel. Copying what another organization is doing is easy. Being creative and innovative while understanding your market is much more difficult.

The hallmark of successful clusters according to Prof. Porter is robust private competition leading to productivity improvements.

A cluster will not do this hard work for you but may stimulate ideas and originality as well as provide benefits to help you succeed. Effectively leading your organization is still up to you.

Myth #5 - Portal marketing is a cluster.

Engaging in portal marketing – a group of related service providers creating a website portal to promote their businesses and generate leads – is not the same as creating a medical tourism cluster. Calling it one is simply misleading for participants and consumers. And, for the most part this activity is wasteful.

Portal marketing is just as its name describes – a series of doors to other websites that potential patients are invited to enter. A portal is simply a marketing channel, where pooled resources promote the participating businesses. For example, Amazon is a marketing portal in the retail category, where many thousands of distributors make their goods available on a single platform.



The portal itself does not foster creativity, innovation, differentiation, or any of the other benefits that a cluster produces. And portal marketing is certainly not based on the belief that a rising economic tide lifts all boats. The function of portal marketing is allocation and distribution.

If someone tries to sell you a portal as a “cluster”, you can be sure that you are not buying anything more than a “me too” marketing approach that has not worked very well. Demand to see examples of successful portals; there are precious few.

The dimension of medical tourism clusters

In this five part series of articles about medical tourism clusters, key topics about this often misunderstood concept have been explored. Second, the classic definition of “cluster” was dissected to fully grasp the concepts ingrained in it. Third, those concepts were applied to two successful medical travel destinations – Korea and Costa Rica – to see whether the cluster concepts fit the models. Fourth, the role of competition within clusters was reviewed to encourage new thinking about collaboration and differentiation. Finally, five myths about medical tourism clusters dispelled hype and other false notions that have led to many disappointing attempts to create clusters.

Different models exist for successfully leveraging healthcare and medical tourism for economic and social benefits. Selecting the right path forward is a challenging course of action that requires commitment and leadership. Discovering which path to follow is an exciting opportunity.

The team at Medical Tourism Training is ready to help you explore the path to greater success in medical travel. [Contact us today](#) to begin the discussion of how we can work together.

About Medical Tourism Training, Inc.:

Medical Tourism Training offers training and consulting services in the rapidly growing domestic and international health travel sector.

The company is the first to offer affordable, convenient, and easy to use e-Learning solutions geared to working professionals. Medical Tourism Training delivers high quality on-site training and consulting services creating measurable change for its clients.

Consulting services include: lead generation & lead conversion; patient experience assessment, training, and consulting; relaunch strategies; formalizing and developing medical clusters; certification programs; creative and innovative marketing campaigns; and much more.

Contact us today for additional information:

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