

FOREIGN DOCTORS AND FOREIGN PATIENTS. LEARN AND TREAT YOURSELF IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

If the medical tourism is issued mainly from an industrialized area with a significant purchasing power, like USA, Canada, Great Britain or West Europe, the students who come in Romania to study medicine, arrive from countries like Tunisia, Iran, Palestine, Morocco, etc. No matter what countries provide, on one hand, medical tourism and on the other hand, foreign students, what is for sure is the fact that Romania has a big advantage, mainly because these human resources represent a capital and an investment for our country.

Keywords: Medical tourism, Foreign students, Economic development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Once Romania was integrated in the European Union, in 2007, almost 25.000 doctors and 15.000 nurses left the country, for Germany, France, Spain, etc. They benefit from European Union's rules that allow the free movement of the work force, including the situation when a certain country has problems in replacing the medical staff that leaves abroad.

The transit begins with students that had the possibility to come and study in Romania, followed by patients who chose our country, in order to get a treatment.

Lately, Romania is a country where multicultural values are highlighted. Our country has succeeded in attracting both foreign students and foreign patients. More and more people start to hear good things about Romania, and the chances for development are extending.

2. STUDY IN ROMANIA

In Romania, almost 70% of medical staff works in public health care system. Our country has a low number of doctors, in comparison with other countries. According to the World Health Organization, Romania has 22, 7 doctors for 10.000 inhabitants. For example, Hungary has 30, 3 doctors for 10.000 inhabitants and Croatia has 26 doctors for 10.000 inhabitants.

With health expenditures which are situated around 3 or 4% of the GDP, Romania is located in back of the pack of the European countries (Duez et al., 2013: 23). However, what policy makers should understand is that health funds are not “financial loss” to society, but they can be regarded as true investments (Cicea, 2011: 38).

Moreover, the medium salary for a Romanian doctor is also low. An experimented doctor is paid with 20.000 dollars per year, while in Germany, the medium salary is 82.000 dollars per year and in Great Britain, the amount reaches 120.000 dollars per year (according to the Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development).

Indicator	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002
Per capita total expenditure on health (PPP int. \$)	872.9	863.9	880.9	825.7	814.7	668.0	565.8	514.1	476.8	409.6	323.2
Per capita government expenditure on health (PPP int. \$)	678.5	684.3	707.8	651.7	668.0	549.4	451.5	415.3	357.4	347.4	265.7
Physicians density (per 10 000 population)				22.69							
Number of physicians				48484							
General government expenditure on health as a percentage of total expenditure on health	77.7	79.2	80.4	78.9	82.0	82.3	79.8	80.8	75.0	84.8	82.2
Number of pharmaceutical personnel				11894							
General government expenditure on health as a percentage of total government expenditure	11.3	11.3	11.9	10.8	11.3	11.3	11.4	13.2	12.1	13.5	10.8
Private expenditure on health as a percentage of total expenditure on health	22.3	20.8	19.6	21.0	18.0	17.8	20.2	19.2	25.1	15.2	17.8

FIGURE 1 – HEALTH INDICATORS
Source: World Health Organization

Even if our doctors leave the country, not all is lost. More and more foreign students wish to make their medical studies in Romania, and also, they prefer to practice medicine here.

For example, a lot of students from France, who fail to enter the medical schools, come to Romania, in order to pursue their dream. The choice of any profession is based on a series of motivational factors specific to each category of age and experience in the field (Muscalu and Muntean, 2012: 68).

The Romanian medical system presents a lot of advantages, in comparison with the one from France or from occidental countries:

- Admission without any contest, based only on a candidate's file ;
- Accessible tuition fee ;
- Possibility of financial aid ;
- Diploma recognized all over Europe ;
- Every student can be admitted for the next year, by passing all his/her exams ;
- Small groups for the practical works started since the first year ;
- The possibility to change the specialization ;
- Multi-cultural environment ;
- Professors can speak several international languages (English, French, Spanish, etc).

Romania has very accessible fees for foreign students, as mentioned in the table below:

Comparison of medicine study cost

COUNTRY	FEES (Euros)	
	EU, EEA, Suisse students	Non - EU, EEA students
Romania	1 050 - 5 000	3 200 - 5 000
Bulgaria	5 000 - 6 000	5 500 - 8 000
Spain	20 000 - 20 000	20 000 - 20 000
UK	22 000 - 30 000	22 000 - 30 000
Tchek	13 000	13 000
Slovakia	12 000	12 000
Hungary	10 000	10 000
Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad	20 000	20 200

FIGURE 2 COMPARISON OF MEDICINE STUDY COST

Source : www.medicalstudyguide.com

In Romania, every foreign student who wishes to attempt the medical faculty has to have the baccalaureate diploma.

Another advantage is the fact that if the student already has 1 or 2 years of study in his/her own country, they could continue with other disciplines, also having the chance to equate them.

Most of the students, after finishing their studies, prefer to remain in Romania, in order to become doctors or even, to open their own private clinics. We have several examples of private clinics, where doctors from Turkey, Israel, France, Germany, etc work. These doctors refuse to return in their countries, since the living cost from Romania is much cheaper than the one from their residence countries.

Moreover, for Romania, this attitude is a gaining one. Even if our native doctors prefer to leave the country, there will always be the foreign doctors who will have the desire to live and work in a country like Romania. So, the medical staff's deficit is covered step by step, by the rest of the doctors.

3. MEDICAL TOURISM

“Medical tourism” represents the movement of different persons from their residence country, to another one, in order to receive medical services, which are less expensive, more modern, accessible, etc, in comparison with what they find in their own countries. Somehow, this expression has an improper character since the patients are coming mainly to treat themselves and, only in some cases, to visit that country.

Nowadays, in Romania, two actions are taking place: on the one hand, Romanian doctors are leaving the country, because of financial reasons, and, on the other hand, foreign patients are coming to treat themselves in Romanian private clinics, due to lower costs.

Thousands of foreign people chose to treat themselves, annually, in Romania, due to lower prices, in comparison with other European countries.

The medical tourism seems more like a phenomenon, and according to the National Agency of Tourism Agencies, seems to rapidly increase. Also, according to a study made by Insight Market Research Solutions, a foreign people pays with 40% less, for a medical package, than the residence countries.

The main reasons why people chose medical tourism are:

- Lower costs for medical treatments ;
- An easier access to medicines ;
- Choosing the same quality but with less fees ;
- Easy access to different medical procedures ;

- Escape from residence laws, etc.

Last year, in Romania, the medical tourism brought incomes equal at about 250 million dollars, and the number of foreign patients is increasing every year.

The majority of patients come from Germany, Italy, Israel and Great Britain. They prefer Romania, instead of their country, because they can find the same conditions and the same well prepared doctors, only with a cost which is almost half of what they would have to pay in their own countries.

Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Croatia, even they were very affected by the economic crisis, invest a lot in private clinics, in order to attract west Europeans and even Americans, for dentist treatments and plastic surgery.

Foreigners chose countries like Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and Hungary for their low prices and also because the national health insurances do not cover some services, like plastic surgery.

Private clinics have a lot of advantages from foreign patients, especially the fact that they generate more than a half of total incomes of a specific clinic.

Last year, Romania had 1, 71 million foreign tourists, from which 58% were for business purposes and the rest, for medical treatments.

For example, we can see the comparison below, concerning the services for dentist consultations, in several countries from Europe.

We could easily observe that in some countries the consultation is free, while in other countries, the prices are "blooming". As we have already mentioned, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and Hungary, have the lowest and the most accessible prices, in comparison with other countries. In Romania, even if our clinics perceive a fee for a simple consultation, still, for medical treatments, the price won't reach the level of other countries. In other words, even if the patient pays at a first view, after that, the costs will be reasonable.

TABLE 1 COSTS FOR MEDICAL PACKAGE

Country	Medical package	Cost
Poland	Dentist consultation	free
Italy	Dentist consultation	free
Bulgaria	Dentist consultation	from 15 euro
Hungary	Dentist consultation	from 19,8 euro
Romania	Dentist consultation	from 22 euro
Spain	Dentist consultation	from 65 euro
London	Dentist consultation	from 70 euro
Germany	Dentist consultation	from 120 euro

Source: made by author

Here, for a dentist consult, Romania occupies the 5th position, with a fee starting from 22 euro.

In the next table, we have summarized the costs for a plastic surgeon consultation.

In this case, Romania is situated on the 3rd position, with a cost at about 25 euro.

From these 2 tables we can see why patients from Germany or Great Britain prefer to come for treatments in Romania or Hungary. Prices are low and conditions are pretty much the same with the abroad clinics.

TABLE 2 COSTS FOR PLASTIC SURGEON CONSULTATION

Country	Medical package	Cost
Poland	Plastic Surgeon Consultation	free
Spain	Plastic Surgeon Consultation	free
Romania	Plastic Surgeon Consultation	from 25 euro
Hungary	Plastic Surgeon Consultation	from 30 euro
Greece	Plastic Surgeon Consultation	from 50 euro
Bulgaria	Plastic Surgeon Consultation	from 50 euro
London	Plastic Surgeon Consultation	from 100 euro
Germany	Plastic Surgeon Consultation	from 120 euro

Source: made by author

Most of our examples concern private clinics. We won't make allusion at public hospitals and clinics, because in almost 80% of European countries exist the health care insurance which covers the majority of costs.

Another example, concerns a simple consultation at a generalist. While in London, this consultation costs at about 160 euro, in Romania, the same consultation, is no more than 25 euro. In Great Britain the same consultation, is almost 6 times more expensive.

Romania is one of the emerging destinations for medical tourism as it is noted for high standard healthcare system and reasonable price. Mostly Romania is chosen for plastic and weight loss surgeries, cardiovascular surgery and dental treatment.

TABLE 3 COSTS FOR DENTAL IMPLANTS

Country	Medical package	Cost
Belgium	Dental implants	from 600 to 800 euro
Slovenia	Dental implants	from 750 to 900 euro
Romania	Dental implants	from 1000 to 1300 euro
Czech	Dental implants	from 1400 to 1600 euro
Germany	Dental implants	from 2000 to 2100 euro
London	Dental implants	from 3400 to 3800 euro

Source: made by author

In Table 3, Romania is still situated on the 3rd place, concerning dental implants. Even if our country has a middle position, still, foreigners from Germany and London prefer Romania due to a low cost of living (low prices for accommodation, food, transport, etc).

Seeing the examples above, Romania is among the cheapest country for medical treatments, offering high level conditions, well prepared doctors and modern treatments. That's why, our private clinics annually increase their revenues and try to offer their best for foreign patients.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The medical tourism represents a real advantage for our country. The main benefice is derived from the fact that, on local scale, our country has the chance to develop herself from an economical point of view.

Also, the patients who come to Romania for treatments, have the chance to find out that the country has a lot to offer, especially well prepared specialists, good conditions and ultra-modern equipment, all that at a lower price.

Moreover, the fact that foreign students come to Romania to learn medicine and a big part of them, even remain here to practice it, shows that our medical universities have a good reputation and are still preparing some of the best future doctors.

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