

Digital Discourses on Medical Tourism: How Indonesians Consider Visiting Penang for Healthcare – A Netnographic Study on Twitter

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of medical tourism from Indonesia to Penang, Malaysia, has continued to show a significant upward trend in recent years. In today's digital era, social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) have become active public discussion arenas, places where netizens share experiences, provide recommendations, and even consider decisions to undergo treatment abroad. This study aims to explore how digital narratives related to the practice of seeking medical treatment in Penang are formed, spread, and negotiated by Indonesians on the X platform. Using a netnography approach, this study analyzes tweets containing keywords related to treatment in Penang, revealing the dynamics of conversations in various discussions in the digital space. The results of the analysis identified four main themes that dominated the conversation: (1) ease of access and convenience of services; (2) exchange of information and recommendations between users; (3) crisis of trust in domestic health services; and (4) considerations of price, quality, and added value offered by services in Penang. These findings indicate that the decision to seek medical treatment abroad is not only influenced by medical needs or individual preferences, but also by social constructions formed in the digital space. Social media plays an important role as an e-WOM (electronic word of mouth) channel that shapes public perception and preferences for cross-country health services. This research is expected to contribute to the development of health communication and digital culture studies, as well as being a basis for thinking about managing information and health service reputation more strategically in the era of social media.

Keyword: medical tourism, Penang, health communication, netnography, platform X

INTRODUCTION

Revealed by Jokowi in 2024, the nation has incurred losses amounting to hundreds of trillions of rupiah due to the preference of Indonesian nationals (WNI) for medical treatment abroad, with estimates suggesting an annual loss of approximately 180 trillion rupiah (Yopi Makdori, 2024). There has been an undeniable increase over the past decade, particularly regarding medical tourism to Malaysia, especially Penang, which has emerged as a focal point of interest among Indonesians. This phenomenon is manifested in the growing number of Indonesian patients who are opting for international healthcare services as an alternative to the domestic healthcare system. According to a report published by the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC), Indonesia stands as the foremost contributor of international patients to Malaysia, with Penang being the preferred city owing to its esteemed reputation and the provision of quality, affordable, and accessible medical services (MHTC, 2020).

Over the last several years, medical tourism has appeared as a prominent international trend, with countless individuals moving beyond borders to seek medical assistance that is more cost-effective, of enhanced quality, or offered in a faster way (Connell, 2013). A prominent destination for medical tourists originating from Indonesia is Penang, Malaysia, renowned for its healthcare facilities that adhere to international standards, competitive pricing, and its geographical and cultural proximity (Ormond & Sothorn, 2012).

The advent of social media, especially Twitter, has transformed the methodologies through which individuals seek and disseminate information pertaining to healthcare services internationally. This platform functions not merely as a repository of recommendations but also as a forum for dialogue where users exert influence on one another through narratives, evaluations, and comparisons of medical services (Gupta et al., 2020). Given its high level of engagement within Indonesia, Twitter serves as a crucial medium to comprehend how Indonesian individuals conceptualize medical tourism to Penang. In the contemporary digital era, the decision to pursue treatment abroad is influenced not solely by word of mouth (WOM) from family members, acquaintances, medical travel agents, or physician referrals, but also by the information and narratives disseminated through social media platforms. Twitter (now X) represents one such social medium that has evolved into a digital public sphere where individuals exchange experiences related to information-seeking and articulate considerations regarding various matters, including options for overseas medical treatment.

Stimulated by a multitude of events, including tweets disseminated by the seventh president of Indonesia concerning the substantial financial outflow for medical treatment (Jokowi, 2022), dialogues regarding alternatives for treatment abroad, particularly in Singapore, Malaysia, and China, have emerged. The impetus provided by the statement ignited discussions across diverse social media platforms, including Twitter. This phenomenon illustrates that social media functions not only as a conduit for interpersonal communication but also evolves into a discursive arena that shapes collective perceptions and exerts influence over health behaviors (Lupton, 2014).

Prior research has demonstrated that social media is instrumental in shaping perceptions pertaining to health-related risks, benefits, and decision-making processes (Ventola, 2014). Within the context of medical tourism, digital narrations on social media platforms can construct or reinforce the image of a nation as a premier destination for health services (Turner, 2007). On Twitter, users not only recount their treatment experiences in Penang but also solicit advice, provide testimonials, and formulate travel plans predicated on the feedback from other netizens. Consequently, the consideration of seeking medical treatment in Penang is not merely an individual decision-making process; rather, it is intricately woven into a network of mutually influential digital discourses.

Malaysian medical tourism communication serves a pivotal role in the formulation of Indonesian public perceptions and in shaping their decisions to pursue medical services within Malaysia. This communication framework encompasses a multitude of factors, including competitive pricing, the caliber of care, and the credibility of Malaysia's healthcare services, which collectively bolster Malaysia's reputation as the preferred medical tourism destination for Indonesian nationals. The efficacy of these communication initiatives is manifest in the substantial influx of Indonesian medical tourists to Malaysia, propelled by personal convictions and societal influences. Presented below are critical elements regarding the impact of Malaysian medical tourism communication on Indonesian perceptions and decision-making processes.

Factors Influencing Indonesian Medical Travelers Credibility and Quality of Service: Malaysia has effectively conveyed the credibility of its healthcare services, encompassing the proficiency of its medical practitioners and the superior quality of medical apparatus, which are held in high regard by Indonesian patients. This perception is integral in fostering trust and confidence among potential medical tourists hailing from Indonesia (Damayanti et al., n.d.). **Behavioral Beliefs and Social Influence:** Indonesian medical tourists are significantly swayed by the conviction that Malaysian medical offerings provide superior quality and cost-effectiveness in comparison to services available in Indonesia. Furthermore, subjective norms, such as endorsements from familial and social networks, substantially impact their decision to pursue medical treatment in Malaysia (Saragih & Jonathan, 2019; Selwendri et al., 2024). **Perceived Value**

and Destination Image: The perceived value associated with medical services, when coupled with a favorable destination image, enhances customer satisfaction and shapes intentions to return to Malaysia for medical reasons. This notion is further reinforced by the amalgamation of tourism activities with medical services, rendering Malaysia an appealing destination (Selwendri et al., 2024) (Ningrum et al., 2023). Communication Strategy and Market Positioning Marketing and Strategic Communications: Malaysia's strategic communication initiatives encompass the promotion of competitive advantages, such as affordability and the accessibility of specialized medical services. This endeavor is essential in establishing Malaysia as the preeminent medical tourism destination within Southeast Asia (Zain et al., 2023). Integration with Tourism: The synergistic combination of medical care and tourism activities represents a distinctive selling proposition that Malaysia adeptly communicates to prospective Indonesian travelers. This integration not only enhances the overall experience but also fortifies Malaysia's brand identity as a comprehensive health tourism destination (Ningrum et al., 2023) (Zain et al., 2022).

While the communications pertaining to Malaysian medical tourism have proven effective in drawing Indonesian tourists, a multitude of obstacles and components require analysis. The COVID-19 crisis has had a major impact on how people travel, demanding revisions in communication tactics to sufficiently handle safety and hygiene-related issues (Jamin et al., 2020). Additionally, the emphasis on South-South intra-regional medical travel underscores the necessity for Malaysia to perpetually refine its strategic approach to sustain its competitive advantage within the region (Ormond & Sulianti, 2017). In conclusion, Malaysia's medical tourism communication has adeptly influenced Indonesian public opinion by accentuating the credibility, quality, and affordability of its healthcare services. These concerted efforts, in conjunction with strategic marketing and the integration of tourism, have effectively positioned Malaysia as the preferred destination for Indonesian medical tourists. Nonetheless, persistent challenges such as the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the fluid dynamics of regional medical travel necessitate ongoing adaptation and continuous innovation in communication strategies.

The present investigation is predicated on the hypothesis that the narratives disseminated on Twitter encapsulate societal constructs regarding what is deemed the "optimal treatment" or "service worthy of consideration." Such narratives may embody elements of trust, dissatisfaction with regional services, or aspirations for enhanced medical care. Employing a netnographic methodology (Kozinets, 2010), this research endeavors to scrutinize how Indonesian individuals articulate and contemplate the phenomenon of medical travel to Penang within digital dialogues on Twitter.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) provides a strong foundational framework for understanding health-related decision making. The theory states that an individual's behavior is directly influenced by their intention, which is shaped by their attitude toward the behavior and subjective norms. Attitudes reflect personal evaluations of the consequences of an action, while subjective norms refer to perceived social pressures to perform or not perform a behavior. In the context of health tourism, TRA has been extended to include the construct of desirability as a mediator between attitude, subjective norms, and behavioral intention. This expanded model, as described by Lucian et al. (2024), suggests that desirability plays a critical role in translating cognitive evaluations into actionable intentions, particularly in shaping tourist loyalty and decisions. Although TRA offers a relevant theoretical framework, its application has limitations, especially in diverse socio-cultural contexts. Factors such as past experiences, cultural background, and individual aspirations also have significant influences on health behavior that cannot always be explained by attitudes and norms alone. Therefore, in analyzing digital discourse on platforms such as Twitter, theoretical approaches need to be adapted to specific contexts, so that the health communication strategies developed can be more culturally sensitive and effective in reaching potential medical tourists from Indonesia.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), conceptualized by Ajzen in 1991, serves as a fundamental framework striving to clarify the complex interactions between behavioral intentions and the various influences that mold them, which comprise personal attitudes towards particular behaviors, the subjective norms prevailing in a social context, and the beliefs individuals maintain about their own control over those behaviors. Within this analytical

framework, it is imperative to recognize that the attitudes individuals possess concerning their decisions to pursue medical interventions in foreign countries, the social pressures exerted by peers and other individuals who have undergone similar experiences, and the accessibility of pertinent information are all critical determinants that significantly contribute to the formation of an intention to seek healthcare services in the region of Penang. Furthermore, it is essential to highlight that the examination of digital narratives can be considered a valuable avenue for analyzing cultural communication, as these narratives serve as reflective mirrors that capture and convey the collective perceptions regarding the quality of available health services, the levels of interethnic trust that exist within the community, and the diverse experiences of individuals who constitute the medical diaspora. To conclude, applying the Theory of Planned Behavior in this scenario not only offers a solid structure for comprehending the elements that affect healthcare-seeking actions but also paves the way for investigating how cultural stories mold and guide public views on health-related choices across different demographic segments.

The study is predicated on the assumption that the narratives articulated on Twitter mirror social constructs regarding what is deemed the “optimal treatment” or “services worthy of consideration.” Such narratives may embody elements of trust, dissatisfaction with local services, or aspirations to attain superior medical care. Employing a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2010), this study seeks to explore how Indonesians engage in discourse regarding and contemplate medical travel to Penang within digital conversations on Twitter.

Research Gap & Research Significance Notwithstanding the extensive body of research on medical tourism, investigations that focus on the digital perspective within Indonesian society remain considerably scarce. The majority of prior studies have predominantly employed surveys or interviews, while analyses of online discourse within social media platforms have not been thoroughly investigated. Indeed, Twitter, as a digital public sphere, has the potential to furnish real-time, authentic insights into the preferences, apprehensions, and anticipations of prospective medical travelers.

Research Objectives The study to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the digital discourse on Twitter regarding medical tourism to Penang among the Indonesian populace. Identify the primary determinants that shape their considerations, such as cost, quality of service, hospital reputation, or the experiences recounted by other users.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research endeavor employed a qualitative netnographic methodology to delve into the intricate digital narratives articulated by Indonesians as they contemplate undertaking medical journeys to Penang, Malaysia, utilizing the social media platform X, which was previously known as Twitter. Netnography, which can also be referred to as online ethnography, represents a sophisticated qualitative research technique that was innovatively developed by the esteemed scholar Robert V. Kozinets, with the primary aim of comprehensively understanding the multifaceted social, cultural, and discursive practices that emerge and evolve within various online communities (Kozinets, 2010). Netnography, which entails ethnographic research conducted in the digital landscape, has been selected as the methodological approach due to its capacity for a profound examination of digital discourse (Kozinets, 2010). This methodological framework facilitates the identification of communication patterns, underlying motivations, and the social and cultural determinants that impact decisions related to health tourism.

In essence, netnography serves as a contemporary adaptation of the traditional ethnographic approach, enabling researchers to investigate the collectively constructed meanings that arise from genuine digital interactions among users, all while minimizing any potential researcher's influence or interference in these authentic exchanges (Kozinets, 2010). By employing this particular methodological framework, scholars are afforded the opportunity to meticulously trace and analyze the discourse, values, and social representations that pertain to the phenomenon of medical tourism directed towards Penang, as articulated by social media participants within the context of digital public arenas..

The focus of this research endeavor is centered around the examination of a public narrative that is disseminated on the social media platform known as X, commonly referred to as Twitter, particularly through the utilization of specific keywords such as "treatment in Penang" and "medical tourism Penang," which serve as focal points in understanding the discourse surrounding healthcare services and tourism in that region. The selection of Twitter's digital environment as the primary site for this investigation is predicated on the platform's inherent characteristics of open accessibility, which permits individuals from all walks of life to engage with and scrutinize public dialogues without the prerequisite of being embedded within the social networks of particular users, thereby fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the conversations taking place. This methodological approach aligns seamlessly with the ethical considerations outlined in netnographic research, which emphasize the importance of conducting non-participatory observations of data that is readily available for public consumption, as articulated by Kozinets in his seminal work from 2010.

The data was procured through sophisticated searches on Twitter, employing the advanced search functionality complemented by filters pertaining to date, language, and keyword pertinence. The temporal scope of the analysis encompasses January 2023 to March 2025, aimed at examining narratives pertinent to the research themes. Relevant tweets are systematically extracted and subsequently selected based on the following inclusion criteria: Authored by an Indonesian-speaking user; Engaging in discussions regarding experiences, recommendations, or treatment modalities for Penang; devoid of commercial promotion (including hospital advertising, endorsements, or tweets emanating from the official accounts of institutions).

The data were scrutinized utilizing a netnographic thematic analysis methodology, as delineated by Kozinets (2015, 2020), through the following sequential phases; Immersion: Researchers engage deeply with digital communities to comprehend the contextual nuances of user interactions; Data Collection and Categorization: Tweets are amassed, organized, and classified according to narrative typologies (personal experiences, recommendations, inquiries, testimonials, etc.); Thematic Coding: This phase aims to discern the prevailing themes that surface from the narratives, such as treatment motivations, perceptions of healthcare institutions, comparisons with local services, travel experiences, and related aspects. Interpretation and Cultural Analysis: The identified themes are examined within both theoretical (TPB) and sociocultural frameworks, facilitating an understanding of how collective perceptions regarding medical tourism are constructed in the digital realm.

In order to uphold credibility and qualitative rigor, researchers adopted a source triangulation methodology, which involves contrasting narratives derived from various user accounts and discussion threads. Furthermore, indirect member checking is conducted through the scrutiny of advanced discourse, to ascertain whether the interpretation of the narrative remains stable or has undergone alteration. The analysis is also subjected to examination by professional colleagues within academic discussion forums to facilitate peer debriefings.

This investigation adheres to the ethical principles of netnography as articulated by Kozinets (2010), wherein the data under analysis is publicly accessible and does not necessitate explicit consent from the account owner, provided that there is no infringement on privacy or dissemination of personal identities. All cited tweets will be anonymized, omitting account names or images, and will present solely text excerpts as deemed necessary for scholarly purposes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Through netnographic data analysis on Twitter, there are four main themes that describe the dynamics of digital discourse related to Indonesian people's considerations for seeking medical treatment in Penang. These themes are: ease of access and convenience of services; exchange of information and recommendations between users; crisis of trust in domestic health services; and considerations of price, quality, and added value of services in Penang.

Ease of access and convenience of services

Health problems in Indonesia, as shown in tweets related to medical treatment in Penang, illustrate the idea that if you want to get the best treatment, you have to go to Jakarta (or a big city in Indonesia) which has the best hospitals and adequate facilities. However, because access to

Jakarta is further, longer, and more difficult to access, the choice to seek treatment in Malaysia, especially Penang, is the most logical choice for residents in Sumatra and Kalimantan. In addition to geographical access, the convenience of services is a consideration and factor in the decision to conduct medical tourism to Malaysia. Health Service Accessibility (Penchansky & Thomas, 1981) states that accessibility of health services includes availability, distance, and convenience.

Through discussions on the X platform, it shows that for patients in Sumatra/Kalimantan, access to Malaysia is more feasible geographically and financially than to Java. Just like Indonesian citizens in Sumatra and Kalimantan prefer to seek medical treatment in Penang or Kuala Lumpur because the distance is closer and transportation costs are cheaper compared to Jakarta:

"But it's really worth it with such a cheap price, Those who seek treatment in Penang because it's close, Doctors in Indonesia are inadequate in number, Hospitals are far from quality, many failures in handling." (@FahrolBekmob)

"In Sumatra, people have been seeking treatment in Malaysia for a long time, it is cheaper and the diagnosis is more precise. Not complicated like in Indonesia." (@indepenSumatera)

A study by Lunt et al. (2016) in the Journal of Medical Tourism found that ease of logistics (such as transportation and accommodation) is a key factor in medical tourism decisions. Discussions about transportation and accommodation are complaints from Indonesian patients about unexpected additional costs, including when associated with family accommodation accompanying them during hospitalization. One of the prominent themes in the digital narrative is the ease of accessing health services in Penang. Patients said that the fast registration process, one-stop service facilities, and ease of communication with the hospital were the main reasons for choosing Penang.

In the theory of Perceived Behavioral Control from the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2005), the perception of the ease of performing an action will increase the intention to do so. The extent to which someone feels easy or able to perform an action, where in this context, the digital narrative shows that patients feel more able to access health services in Penang because of the efficient registration system, responsive services, and clarity of procedures and costs. In this context, the perception of ease of access to health services in Penang increases the intention to make medical trips.

"It was my first time in Penang, but I was helped with everything from airport pick-up to hotel booking. It was like a medical tourism package." (@forumkesehatan)

"There is already a system there that makes it easier for patients and their families. As soon as you leave the building, there is a taxi/van that will pick you up and take you straight to the hospital. No need to bother looking for transportation or worry about being cheated. Safe, comfortable, cheap, quality." (@VladisVya)

The ease of administrative procedures and services is often referred to as a push factor in medical tourism. Penang offers a patient experience that is straightforward and has minimal bureaucracy, in contrast to the patient's perception of the system in Indonesia which is considered "tiring and slow." Connell (2011) also emphasized that patients from developing countries tend to choose destinations like Penang because of the ease of navigating the service system. Facilities such as communication via email or WhatsApp in Indonesian, online booking, and airport pick-up services make the patient experience more comfortable and have minimal obstacles.

"Finally, there is a doctor who speaks. Even in Penang, there is medical tourism and some doctors can speak Indonesian. Actually, my concern has always been about the health facilities that are not evenly distributed." (@hannaconnia)

Narratives in online forums and social media consistently present Penang as a user-friendly location, even for elderly patients or patients with limited international experience.

In addition, related to the Service Quality offered, it explains how the perception of high service quality, both in terms of tangibles (facilities), reliability, and responsiveness, encourages patients to choose overseas services. When services are considered faster, more informative, and respectful of patients' time, the perception arises that access to Penang is more ideal than local services. Patient narratives illustrate that one of the dominant factors in the decision to seek

treatment in Penang is the ease and convenience of the service. Many users said that they could make an appointment with a specialist doctor in a relatively short time, even without a long referral as in Indonesia. Overall, it is said that hospitals in Malaysia offer all-inclusive packages (consultation, room, transportation, and airport transfers), while in Indonesia, patients often face additional costs that are not transparent. Ease of access and convenience are the main determining factors. Malaysia's integrated health logistics system (such as special hospital taxis) reduces the burden on patients, while in Indonesia, referral facilities are still concentrated in Java, making it difficult for regional patients. Border areas such as Riau and West Kalimantan are closer to Penang/Malacca than to referral hospitals in Java. For patients, a Joint Commission International (JCI) accredited Malaysian private hospital is a better choice. Ease of access and convenience of services are factors that are inseparable from the patient's decision to seek treatment in Penang, Malaysia.

Exchange of information and recommendations between users

The phenomenon of information exchange and recommendations between users can be analyzed using the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), which is informal communication between consumers through digital media that influences consumption decisions. In this context, narratives about the experience of seeking medical treatment in Penang shared through health forums and Twitter are sources of information that are often referred to by those interested in treatment in Penang.

A study of travelers by Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen (2011) showed that positive and detailed consumer reviews on digital platforms greatly influence the decisions of potential customers, even stronger than official information from institutions. This finding is in line with the narrative of Indonesian patients who rely more on testimonials from fellow users about certain doctors, hospitals, or medical agents, rather than just reading the hospital's official website. Moreover, this online community forms an informal knowledge network that supports patients in the pre-decision stage. The recommendations given are also very practical; for example, when is the best time to make an appointment, immigration procedures, or which hospital is most suitable for a particular type of disease that is rarely found in official information. This shows how digital platforms have become alternative "counseling spaces", providing peer-to-peer support related to discussions about seeking medical treatment in Penang.

The digital narrative also shows the strong role of online communities in exchanging information and recommendations. Many users ask questions, give reviews, or suggest hospitals and medical references in Penang based on their personal experiences. One of the important findings of this study is how digital communication forms a very strong e-WOM pattern. Patients share detailed information ranging from recommended doctors, the best time to seek treatment, to costs and accommodation tips.

This phenomenon can be analyzed through the concept of eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), which emphasizes the influence of digital consumer communication in shaping perceptions and decisions. Amidst the limitations of official information that is considered less neutral or too technical, testimonials from fellow users become a more credible and relatable source of reference. Even the narrative often includes visual evidence, such as photos of examination results, price lists, and evidence of communication with the hospital, which further strengthens the value of trust in the online community. This is in line with the concept of social proof (Cialdini, 2001), where individuals are encouraged to follow the choices of others who they consider similar or have relevant experiences. According to Cialdini (2001) social proof is a powerful influence tactic where individuals look to others' behavior to guide their own actions, particularly under uncertainty.

Digital discourse creates a space for co-construction of knowledge where users learn from each other's experiences, similar to what is referred to as "lay expertise" in the internet era. Many patients choose to seek treatment in Penang based on recommendations from relatives or testimonials from both WOM and e-WOM on social media, as expressed in a Twitter thread about IVF success in Penang. Informal information exchange accelerates the spread of medical tourism. Dissatisfaction with domestic services reinforces the narrative that Malaysia is more competent. A study by Musa et al. (2012) in BMC Health Services Research showed that 68% of medical

tourism patients chose their destination based on personal recommendations. This reinforces the finding that dissatisfaction with domestic services drives the spread of alternative information through online communities.

Crisis of trust in domestic health services

The crisis of trust in the Indonesian healthcare system is a consistent theme in the digital narratives analyzed. This can be understood through the healthcare distrust framework (Armstrong et al., 2006), which includes distrust of clinical competence, system fairness, and provider care. Many narratives express disappointment over inaccurate diagnoses, confusing bureaucracy, and the mismatch between expectations and services received. Socially, this crisis of trust is also related to netizens comparing the national healthcare system with what they see abroad, both through personal experiences and through other people's narratives. When the overseas system, in this case Penang, is considered more "caring," "friendly," and "competent," the domestic system is considered inferior, causing public trust to continue to decline.

Highlighting the importance of trust, effective communication, and credibility in shaping public opinion in Indonesia (Damayanti et al., 2021). Furthermore, distrust of Indonesian medical services can arise from perceptions of quality, personal experiences, limited information, cultural factors, and comparative analysis with Malaysian healthcare. These elements collectively influence the decision of some Indonesians to seek medical care outside their home country, particularly in Malaysia. Negative perceptions of private hospitals in Indonesia reinforce this finding, that uncertainty of service and lack of transparency contribute to poor public perceptions. Digital narratives often include emotional elements such as frustration and despair, indicating emotional dissonance towards the domestic system. In this context, Penang becomes a symbol of "hope" and a solution to systemic failure.

"In Indonesia, every little thing they tell me to have surgery. In Penang they laugh when they see the diagnosis from Indonesia" (@sayajousua).

"Doctors here are like ATM machines, expensive medicine is unclear" (@Bambangakun3).

"In Indonesia I was told to have surgery, in Penang it turned out that light therapy was enough and I could recover. So I'm confused about which one to believe." (@anonimme)

One of the most frequently emerging narratives is the low level of trust in domestic health services, both in terms of competence, clarity of procedures, and service. This reflects a crisis of trust, where patients doubt the good intentions, competence, and integrity of health care providers. When domestic diagnoses are seen as inconsistent or too hasty in taking invasive action, patients tend to seek a "second opinion" abroad. Patients DIRECTLY compare personal experiences and other people's stories to assess the quality of service. Penang in this narrative becomes a symbol of "ideal health" that is more humane, professional, and comprehensive.

The crisis of trust that emerged in the netizen narrative includes: Government regulations, starting from an unregulated medical system, high taxation, even on health services and medical equipment; the relationship between doctors and pharmaceutical companies that triggers distrust of the provision of actions by doctors; the orientation of hospitals that focus on profit; and through news reports, the disclosure of medical malpractice and violations in the ethics and attitudes of medical personnel that are considered very unprofessional. This is rooted in weak regulation and supervision of malpractice and fee-for-service that encourages over-treatment. In addition, human resources that are less appreciated, with low salaries and high workloads are suspected of causing medical personnel to be less motivated in providing optimal services.

Considerations of price, quality, and added value offered by services in Penang.

The decision to seek treatment abroad is not only influenced by negative perceptions of the local system but also by rational calculations of the costs, quality, and added value offered. This approach can be analyzed using the Health Belief Model (HBM), especially the perceived benefits component. Patients see real benefits, both in terms of treatment effectiveness, diagnosis accuracy, and service experience, that outweigh the costs incurred. In addition, price transparency is a significant added value. Patients feel more at ease when they receive an estimate of the costs

up front and do not experience bill “surprises,” unlike their experience at domestic hospitals. The addition of services such as translators, medical visa assistance, and shuttle services reinforces the perception that Penang offers a more professional and humane experience.

Patients consider not only the quality of medical services, but also the costs and added value offered. Many users compare prices between hospitals in Indonesia and Penang, and conclude that Penang offers equivalent (or higher) quality at a more rational cost.

"The cost of an MRI in Jakarta is 6 million, in Penang it is only 3 million, and that too using the latest machine and the results are fast."

"There, patients are treated with empathy, not just from a business perspective."

"From the start, we were given an estimate of the total cost. There were no unexpected costs. That's what made me feel calmer." (Twitter, March 2024)

The combination of competitive prices and high quality is the main pull factor in medical tourism. Patients see Penang as a destination that offers value for money, not just cheap, but quality and transparent. This meaning construction also shows the experiential value aspect where emotional experience and personalization of services are significant added value in health services.

Medical tourist patients to Penang are not only after cheap costs, but also value for money—namely, the quality of service that is equivalent to or even higher than the price paid. In many narratives, patients mentioned that the service package in Penang that includes specialist consultations, laboratory tests, and MRIs has a more reasonable price than the cost of routine check-ups at private hospitals in Jakarta or Surabaya.

A person's decision to take medical action is influenced by perceived benefits. In this case, patients assess that the benefits obtained (fast diagnosis, friendly treatment, convincing results) are higher than the costs incurred. The main motivation for medical tourism patients is not only about cheapness, but also about cost-effectiveness and value-for-money. Additional services such as patient companions, instructions in Indonesian, and flexible schedules reinforce the perception that Penang is not just a place for treatment, but also a place to find peace in the recovery process.

CONCLUSION / KESIMPULAN

The choice of Indonesian citizens to seek medical treatment in Penang, Malaysia is a symptom of systemic problems in the Indonesian health sector, ranging from tax policies, service quality, to public trust. The migration of Indonesian patients to Malaysia is the result of systemic failures in accessibility, transparency, and governance of health services. These findings indicate that the problem is not only about price, but also the holistic patient experience. A holistic solution is needed by considering government policies that must be followed by long-term reforms to improve human resources, infrastructure, and governance. Facing the digital era, where e-WOM is an important factor in disseminating information, this openness of information can also increase the potential for more Indonesian citizens to seek alternatives to seek medical treatment abroad, and on the other hand can further spread the failure of health care in Indonesia.

It is widely believed that the state authorities will initiate important reforms and enforce comprehensive approaches to deal with the several urgent matters that are presently troubling the healthcare field in Indonesia, which has captured the attention of both the populace and health practitioners. In order to facilitate further scholarly inquiry and comprehensive analysis, it is anticipated that a thorough evaluation will be conducted to meticulously assess the various deficiencies and shortcomings inherent within the Indonesian health system, thereby enabling the formulation of necessary enhancements and reforms that the Indonesian government must prioritize and address with urgency.

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