MASTER IN MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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The role of hospital websites and the integration of medical and tourism services to improve patient experience

FINAL MASTER PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the integral offering of medical tourism by hospitals and its impact on the industry, focusing on hospitals in leading and emerging destinations. The study addresses the significant growth of medical tourism, its market expansion, and the strategies employed by healthcare institutions to attract international patients by analyzing how hospitals present their medical tourism services online, examine the integration of tourism related information, and identify key trends and gaps.

The methodology includes conversations with leaders of international patient offices in hospitals from an emerging market, along with content analysis of hospital websites from various countries, including the United States, Mexico, Spain, Thailand, and Colombia, focusing on how these institutions present their medical and tourism services in different ways.

The study reveals that hospitals with a more integrated approach enhance the patient experience and potentially attract more international patients.

The research suggests several recommendations for improving the patient experience that includes the integration of medical tourism services. Hospitals should enhance website usability, provide multilingual support, integrate detailed tourism related information, and develop personalized travel.

This research contributes insights for healthcare institutions to strengthen their medical tourism strategies. It also presents new opportunities for future research, particularly in exploring collaborative efforts between hospitals and tourism entities to enhance patient satisfaction. By closing the gap between medical and tourism services, hospitals can offer a more enriched and competitive experience in the global medical tourism market.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, medical tourism has rapidly emerged as a thriving niche market, offering individuals from foreign countries the opportunity to seek specialized medical treatments and care services in destinations outside their home country. This convergence of the tourism and healthcare sectors presents a unique set of opportunities for destination countries, promising economic growth and development. As the demand for medical tourism continues to rise, driven by factors such as affordability, access to specialized treatments, and reduced waiting times, hospitals have been placed in the position of serving both as healthcare providers and tourism facilitators.

With the increased demand, hospitals have adapted to the competitive environment and develop online platforms that have become instrumental in facilitating information dissemination about their services, logistical support and post treatment care. These platforms have become key for decision-making among prospective medical tourists.

Effective communication is critical, as it inspires international patients with a heightened sense of trust and confidence from the beginning of their medical journeys at these institutions. The quality and effectiveness of the information provided will significantly impact the patient's experience of medical tourism, which is a crucial factor influencing their satisfaction and, consequently, their intention to revisit (Hwang, Lee, & Kang, 2018).

This shift highlights the hospital's evolving role as not only healthcare providers but also as active participants in the tourism industry. This research aims to explore and analyze the online presentations of top hospitals across various established and emerging medical tourism destinations. By examining the content and accessibility of the medical tourism sections on these hospitals websites, the study seeks to identify opportunities for enhancement strategies that optimize the medical tourist experience. Additionally, it investigates not only the presentation of medical services offering, but also an integration of tourism related elements within the medical tourism industry to provide a valuable experience. By analyzing key trends across different countries, the research will provide insights into how hospitals can elevate the quality of the medical tourism experience, strengthen their role within the tourism sector and contribute to its growth.

2. PROBLEMATIC

The integration of medical tourism offerings by hospitals represents a dynamic intersection between the healthcare and tourism industries, presenting both opportunities and challenges. As the medical tourism industry grows, competitive hospitals with well-designed websites have the potential to enhance the patient experience, depending on the quality and effectiveness of the information provided. This raises questions about how the hospital integration on the tourism industry impacts the growth of the industry and how hospitals can market their medical expertise and tourism related information to improve the overall patient satisfaction.

By gaining insights into how the medical services and tourism related information is presented, it reveals that there is an inconsistency and lack of standardized information across the different hospital websites in various medical tourism destinations. Poorly presented information could also affect negatively the potential to attract patients and contribute to the growth of the medical tourism industry.

The findings of this research offer insights into the role the hospitals websites play when shaping potential international patient perceptions and the decision-making process. These insights have the potential to drive positive change for both patients and stakeholders. Additionally, it will shed light on the gaps in the current hospitals practices, pointing opportunities to improve outcomes with targeted interventions that can enhance the medical tourism experience for international patients and the growth of the industry.

3. OBJECTIVES

- Analyze the online presentations of leading hospitals across various rising and established destinations for medical tourism.
- Examine how hospitals integrating their medical tourism offerings and tourism related information on their websites influences patient satisfaction and hospital competitiveness.
- Provide recommendations to optimize medical tourism online platforms, with strong focus on tourism related services, to enhance the overall medical tourist experience.

- Identify key trends in the presentation of medical and tourism information on hospitals in established and emerging medical tourism markets.

4. MEDICAL TOURISM

Medical tourism, is a niche market on the rise characterized by individuals traveling abroad to receive healthcare services, including surgical or therapeutic procedures (Smith, Puczko 2008, as cited in Dabaghi, Saieda Ardakani, & Tabataba'i-Nasab, 2022). It encompasses two types of medical tourist that can be either a traveler intending to receive exclusively medical treatment or those who includes tourism activities alongside the intended medical procedures (Connell, 2006 & Heung et al., 2010, as cited in Dabaghi, Saieda Ardakani, & Tabataba'i-Nasab, 2022).

Medical tourism can relate its origins back to ancient civilizations such as the Greeks, who travelled for the therapeutic benefits of hot springs and baths (Snyder et al., 2011; Hall, 2012, as cited in Lunt, Horsfall, & Hanefeld, 2015). Over centuries, people continue to search these benefits in different destinations like England and Hungary that emerge driven by advancements in transportation and roads development, impulsing the growth of mobility for health reasons.

In the 19th century with industrialization, significant social, economic and technological changes happened, development in internal medicine, surgical techniques and biochemistry, encouraged patient mobility for these more medicalized experiences (Temkin, 1951; Tilney, 2011; Gawande, 2012, as cited in Lunt, Horsfall & Hanefeld, 2015) that by the 20th century Europe and America had become centers of the healthcare world and established medical organizations to set up standards making at that time only high income individuals to afford to travel for medical procedures to these countries (Healt-tourism, n.d.). By continuous growth and development of the health field and technology in the particular case of the United States, healthcare has experienced a deep transformation characterized by significant growth in expenditures during the twentieth century. By 1950, national health care expenditures equaled 4.5% of the GNP (gross national product) and were continuing to rise. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, health spending increased at an even more rapid pace. This has been attributed to expensive new medical technologies and, not surprisingly, health care cost inflation picked up again in the late 1990s (Moseley III, 2008).

The rising prices for medical treatment in the most developed countries made that patients started to look for other options, a shift towards patients from richer, more developed nations travelling to less developed countries to access health services, largely driven by the low-cost treatments available in the latter and helped by cheap flights and internet sources of information (OECD, 2010) helped the rising and development of medical tourism in some countries like Thailand, India, Mexico, Spain, Turkey and more.

As globalization and internet usage have become integral parts of everyday life, the importance of health centers developing online platforms to showcase their services and increase visibility has become evident. Obtaining information about healthcare services abroad is a crucial aspect of the decision-making process in medical tourism. Additionally, the quality of medical services and the expertise of institutions in foreign countries play significant roles as they impact patient's ability to access relevant medical information (Hwang, Lee & Kang, 2018).

Websites serve as key platforms for hospitals, enabling them to provide information and communicate services beyond their physical facilities (Patsioura et al., 2009, as cited in Swathi et al., 2022). They are effective tools for reaching customers and sharing up-to-date information with stakeholders (Aldogan & Özler, 2021, as cited in Swathi et al., 2022). This allows medical tourists to find necessary information; thereby, the initial encounter with medical tourism often occurs through online searches, recommendations from peers, or direct communication with hospitals.

Decision-making in medical tourism involves more complexity than local healthcare choices (Hwang, Lee, & Kang, 2018). Destinations seeking to attract health tourists must offer top-notch health facilities, including hospitals, nursing staff, treatment concepts, health packages, and management services. Hospitals must establish themselves as centers of excellence in their medical tourism programs. Furthermore, they should adhere to hospitality principles typically associated with hospitals or healthcare services (Ediansyah, Arief, Hamsal, & Abdinagoro, 2023). Online platforms assist medical tourists in identifying facilities with certifications that demonstrate a certain standard of expertise among hospital institutions. Loda (2011) and Mason and Wright (2011) (as cited in Wan Abdul Halim, Zainudin, & Mohd Nor, 2021) emphasized the importance of high-quality online information in attracting medical tourists. Given the profitability of the industry, many hospitals invest in making their services more visible and convenient to

their clients, sometimes even establishing specialized departments catering exclusively to international patients.

4.1 STRATEGIC MARKETING PRACTICES IN MEDICAL TOURISM

Effective marketing strategies are crucial for destinations aiming to attract various types of tourists, especially niche markets like medical tourism. These strategies must be based on the provision of high-quality health facilities and services. Given that medical tourism practices are primarily hospital-centric, private hospital websites play a crucial role in promoting medical tourism. Aghbolagh, Hashim, and Cheong (2021) (as cited in Wan Abdul Halim, Zainudin, & Mohd Nor, 2021) suggested that the success of medical tourism revenue depends on how effectively private hospitals promote themselves to attract prospective medical tourists. Private hospital websites serve as significant marketing channels for showcasing destinations medical facilities, expertise, services, treatments, and equipment to both domestic and foreign patients (Mason & Wright, 2011; Turner, 2011; Woo & Schwartz, 2014, as cited in Wan Abdul Halim, Zainudin, & Mohd Nor, 2021).

The establishment of online platforms by hospitals facilitates the dissemination of accurate information, enabling patients to select the appropriate healthcare provider and enhancing their overall customer experience. This phase of the medical tourism journey, which occurs prior to the procedure, significantly impacts the overall customer experience.

Marketing plays a pivotal role in the medical tourism industry, particularly through market segmentation, which allows destinations and hospital platforms to tailor their marketing efforts to specific target audiences based on the hospital's specialization. Branding will help to distinguish hospitals from competitors and to foster a professional and trustworthy perception among potential medical tourists. Marketing efforts should highlight factors such as quality of care, safety standards, advanced technology, and unique treatment offerings to attract and retain patients. Leading medical tourism destinations combine strategies for affordable and high-quality healthcare with the availability of appealing attractions to offer patients a relaxing environment during recovery. Successful marketing strategies in the medical tourism market focus on meeting the needs of the typical international medical traveler, often requiring strong public-private collaboration (Medical Tourism Magazine, n.d.).

Ehrbeck et al. (as cited in Hwang, Lee & Kang, 2018) identified five factors that promote medical tourism, including advanced technology, better-quality care, quicker access to procedures, and lower costs. These factors should inform the development of marketing strategies aimed at attracting medical tourists. Additionally, medical tourism advertisements should emphasize quality improvements and safety standards to build trust and credibility among potential patients.

By comprehending the needs and preferences of target audiences and emphasizing factors like quality of care and unique treatment offerings, stakeholders can capitalize on the opportunities presented by the integration of medical tourism offerings by hospitals. Policymakers must also play a role in promoting destination competitiveness and establishing a supportive ecosystem for the medical tourism industry to thrive, ensuring positive outcomes for patients and stakeholders alike (Ediansyah, Arief, Hamsal, & Abdinagoro, 2023).

4.2 INTEGRATION OF MEDICAL TOURISM OFFERINGS BY HOSPITALS: IMPACT AND STRATEGIES

A key part of the medical tourism industry is the specialized sector that facilitates logistics for the patients traveling to destinations for treatment. Medical tourism has shown consistent global market growth from 2015 to 2021 (The Business Research Company, 2022, as cited in Wong et al., 2024). It is projected to grow from USD 31.53 billion in 2021 to USD 54.20 billion by 2027, reflecting an increase at an average rate of 11.23% (Mordor Intelligence, 2022, as cited in Wong et al., 2024). In the Asian market, Thailand is a leading player, with its medical tourism sector generating approximately USD 340 million in 2010 and USD 622 million in 2013, representing an average annual growth rate of at least 20% (Euromonitor International, 2015 as cited in Beladi, Chao, Ee, & Hollas, 2019).

The sector is thriving, as medical tourists spend not only on medical procedures but also on extended stays, dining, and leisure activities, which boosts overall tourism revenue and benefits the national economy. Due to its ongoing growth, the sector will continue to require an increasing number of workers, creating job opportunities in both the healthcare and related

industries, including tourism. For instance, Lautier (2014) (as cited in Beladi et al. (2019), estimated that medical tourism created 37,000 jobs in Tunisia in 2005, including 18,000 in healthcare and 19,000 in tourism-related industries.

The involvement of hospitals in medical tourism has shifted their role from mere healthcare providers to active participants in the tourism sector. This transformation includes hospitals assisting patients throughout their medical tourism journey, from pre-travel arrangements to post-procedure care.

For instance, Raffles, a prominent private hospital group in Singapore, offers services such as airport transfers, accommodation booking, and local tour arrangements for international patients (Connell, 2006). In the same way, hospitals such as Fundacion Valle de Lili in Colombia, Hospital Médica Sur in Mexico, and Quironsalud in Spain, to say some, have developed comprehensive medical tourism offerings on their platforms. This dual responsibility of delivering medical care while enhancing tourism experiences underscores the evolving nature of medical tourism.

Furthermore, collaborations between healthcare providers and hospitality services often lead to improved overall experiences for medical tourists. Such partnerships may involve securing discounts for patients on accommodation and leisure activities, thereby enriching their stay in the destination country. For instance, patients undergoing less invasive procedures like cosmetic surgery or dental treatments often find it easier to combine medical trips with leisure activities, as indicated by Lovelock & Lovelock (2018). Similarly, de la Puente Pacheco et al. (2020) highlight instances where medical insurance companies facilitated patients movement to a destination to engage in tourist activities during their medical trip.

The online presentation of medical tourism offerings plays a pivotal role in influencing patients decision-making processes and shaping their overall experience. Moslehifar (2016, as cited in Swathi et al., 2022) emphasizes the common practice of medical tourists searching for information on hospitals websites. However, the quality of information provided on these websites varies greatly, with many lacking in accuracy, transparency, and ethical considerations (Samadbeik et al., 2017, as cited in Swathi et al., 2022). Therefore, it is crucial for hospitals to continuously evaluate and improve the quality of their online content to ensure a positive user experience for prospective medical tourists, particularly those from foreign countries.

A key aspect of enhancing the online presence of hospitals involves the development of user-friendly and multilingual websites. Studies by Moghavvemi et al. (2017), Lee et al. (2014), and Ghaderi-Nansa et al. (2020) (as cited in Shaygani et al., 2023), underscore the importance of providing comprehensive information in multiple languages to cater to the diverse needs of international patients. Additionally, the analysis of top hospitals online platforms across various destinations reveals areas for improvement, such as enhancing online interactive services to facilitate communication and provide timely assistance to medical tourists (Moghavvemi et al., 2017, as cited in Swathi et al., 2022).

Optimizing medical tourism online websites and improving the overall medical tourist experience are critical for driving industry growth and maximizing benefits for both patients and destination communities. Strategies focused on enhancing website usability, content accuracy, and reliability are essential in attracting and retaining medical tourists, thereby contributing to the development of sustainable medical tourism ecosystems.

4.3 ENHANCING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN MEDICAL TOURISM: STRATEGIES AND THE ROLE OF HOSPITAL REPUTATION

The satisfaction and loyalty of patients in the medical tourism industry heavily rests on their customer experience. Prior to embarking on their medical journey, patients extensively gather information, often relying on online platforms, recommendations from peers, and feedback from previous patients. According to research by the Medical Tourism Association (2009), nearly half of American medical tourists discovered medical tourism through the internet, with a significant majority seeking specific information about care abroad online before their journey (Moghavvemi, Ormond, Musa, Mohamed Isa, Thirumoorthi, Mustapha, Kanapathy & Chandy, 2017). This initial phase of gathering information is as crucial as the procedure and post-procedure phases in shaping the overall experience.

When patients navigate through the international patient portal of hospitals they are interested in, they initiate their medical tourism journey, aiming for a seamless and effortless experience right from the start. This emphasizes the significance of adopting customer-centric approaches

by healthcare organizations, as it leads to the perception of superior medical services and heightened patient satisfaction, consequently elevating its value (Dabaghi, Saieda Ardakani & Tabataba'i-Nasab, 2022). Recognizing the importance of patient experience, strategies for enhancing customer satisfaction become paramount. Hospitals must prioritize providing positive customer experiences through integrated service systems that cater to diverse patient needs. Assistance in addressing various queries, including visa procedures, appointment scheduling, transportation, language support, and local tour arrangements, if necessary, is crucial (Hwang, Lee, & Kang, 2018). Utilizing user-friendly electronic platforms and personalized communication is essential for meeting customer expectations and fostering positive perceptions. Today's digitally savvy customers expect tailored experiences at every interaction point, underscoring the necessity for personalized service delivery (Dabaghi, Saieda Ardakani & Tabataba'i-Nasab, 2022).

Another aspect to consider during the initial research phase is the exploration of medical center reputation and online information seeking behavior. Patients often rely on online support groups, which encompass social media groups, forums, chat rooms, and blogs, as sources of information to inform their decision-making process (Coulson, 2019 as cited in Forsyth, & Prasad, 2024). The increasing use of electronic devices has contributed to the rise in popularity of these support groups over the past two decades (Wright, 2016 as cited in Forsyth, & Prasad, 2024). Moreover, patients frequently seek reviews from previous customers to assess medical center reputation, although there is a lack of dedicated review platforms for medical centers and their procedures, which presents an opportunity for development in this area.

Additionally, medical center reputation is also important which can be assessed through accreditations such as the Joint Commission, which holds international recognition and can impact future collaborations with insurance companies. Understanding patients perceptions of quality at accredited and non-accredited hospitals is crucial for gaining insights into the dynamics of the medical tourism market (de la Puente Pacheco, de Oro Aguado, Lugo Arias & Fontecha Pacheco, 2020).

5. METHODOLOGY

This research employs two types of methodologies: qualitative and content analysis with quantitative elements. The qualitative methodology explores the expansion of the medical tourism market, its offerings, and strategies across various destinations through conversations with experts, specifically the heads of two international patient offices, to gain insight into the situation in a city with potential to become a leading medical tourism destination, such as Cali, Colombia.

Additionally, the research conducts a content analysis of the online websites of ten hospitals, selected based on the presence of a Medical Tourism section on their website. These hospitals were chosen from top destinations as well as an emerging market, such as Colombia, which is gaining recognition, to understand how they present their medical tourism services. This sample was selected to provide an initial analysis of how hospitals address international patients and include tourism related information for prospective medical tourists.

Table 1. Hospitals selected for content analysis

Country	Hospital	Logo	Website Link
Mexico	Hospital Médica Sur	MédicaSur® Excelencia médica, calidez humana	medicasur.com.mx
	Hospital Galenia	GALENIA HOSPITAL	hospitalgalenia.com
Spain	Clínica Universidad de Navarra	Clínica Universidad de Navarra	cun.es
	Quiron salud	quirónsalud Spanish Medical Care	international.quironsalud.com

United States	Johns Hopkins Hospital		hopkinsmedicine.org
	Massachusetts General Hospital		massgeneral.org
Thailand	Bumrungrad International Hospital		bumrungrad.com
	Bangkok Hospital Medical Center		bangkokhospital.com
Colombia	Hospital Pablo Tobón Uribe		hptu.org
	Fundación Valle de Lili		valledellili.org

Source: Created by the author based on self-collected data.

To facilitate content analysis, the Octoparse software, a web scraping tool, was employed to extract information from each hospital's website. The software analyzed international patient sections to capture data on the hospital's medical tourism offerings, patient services, additional support, and tourism related details. This extraction aimed to reveal how hospitals display their medical tourism services and how these presentations impact patient experiences and contribute to the industry's growth.

Finally, NVivo software was used for content analysis to identify key trends and recurring themes. By processing the extracted data from hospital websites, the software enabled keyword analysis, which revealed common focuses, emerging trends, differences between hospitals, and the integration of tourism related information. This phase of the analysis also highlighted disparities in how hospitals from different regions prioritize and present their medical tourism offerings online.

6. RESULTS

The analysis of hospital websites offering medical tourism services was based on data grouped according to recurring themes, such as the types of medical services offered and how destination tourism related information is presented to medical tourists.

The analysis revealed a wide variety of treatments offered, with particular attention to the most common services across different countries and institutions (Table 2), including specialties such as cardiology, oncology, neurology, and fertility. Notably, some hospitals also emphasize specialized care, diagnostic and imaging services, and transplant services. All hospitals, regardless of location, offered treatments for cardiovascular and oncology care, indicating common services. However, the analysis also highlighted hospitals with specific specializations, such as plastic surgery or transplant services.

Table 2. Medical services offered by top international hospitals for medical tourism

	Fundación Valle de Lili	Hospital Pablo Tobón Uribe	Bumrungrad International Hospital	Bangkok Hospital Medical Center	Johns Hopkins Hospital	Massachusetts General Hospital	Clínica Universidad de Navarra	Quiron Salud	Hospital Galenia	Médica Sur
Cardiology and Cardiovascular Services	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅
Oncology and Hematology	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅
Plastic and Aesthetic Surgery		✅		✅			✅	✅		
Neurology and Neuroscience	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅		✅
Respiratory and Pulmonology	✅	✅	✅	✅		✅	✅	✅		
Gastroenterology and Hepatology	✅	✅		✅	✅	✅	✅	✅		
Endocrinology	✅	✅	✅	✅			✅			

Fertility and Reproduction				✅	✅	✅	✅	✅		✅
Dermatology	✅	✅		✅	✅	✅	✅	✅		
Pediatrics and Child Health		✅		✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅
Women's Health		✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅
Urology	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅		
Rehabilitation and Physical Medicine	✅	✅		✅	✅	✅				
Specialized and Supportive Care	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅		✅		✅
Diagnostic and Imaging	✅	✅		✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅	✅
Preventive Medicine	✅			✅	✅	✅			✅	✅
Transplant Services		✅			✅	✅	✅			✅

Source: Created by the author based on self-collected data.

Additionally, as mentioned before, many hospitals feature destination related services or information on their websites to assist patients in preparing for their trips (Table 3). For instance, some hospitals provide detailed information on accommodations, transportation, city guides, and tours, while others offer this information only upon request or once the medical tourism process begins.

Table 3. Tourism related information displayed by top international hospitals for medical tourism

Hospital	**Destination information - touristic services subtitles display on the website**	**Note**

Fundación Valle de Lili	· Information to consider when planning your trip · About Cali, Colombia	
Hospital Pablo Tobón Uribe	· No related link	Destination information/touristic services will be given to the patient when contacting the hospital directly, not found on the website
Bumrungrad International Hospital	· Personalized Travel Assistance · Patient Services Overview	
Bangkok Hospital Medical Center	· Plan your visit	Destination information/touristic services will be given to the patient when contacting the hospital directly, not found on the website
Johns Hopkins Hospital	· Traveling to the U.S. for Care · International Patient Travel and Accommodations	
Massachusetts General Hospital	· Our Services & Amenities · Visiting Boston as a Mass General Patient · Massachusetts General Hospital Patient & Visitor Information	
Clínica Universidad de Navarra	· Travel assistance · International services · Get to know the city	
Quirón Salud	· No related link	Destination information/touristic services will be given to the patient when contacting the

		hospital directly, not found on the website
Hospital Galenia	· Why Cancun	
Médica Sur	· Get to know Mexico City · Accommodation · Transportation Service	

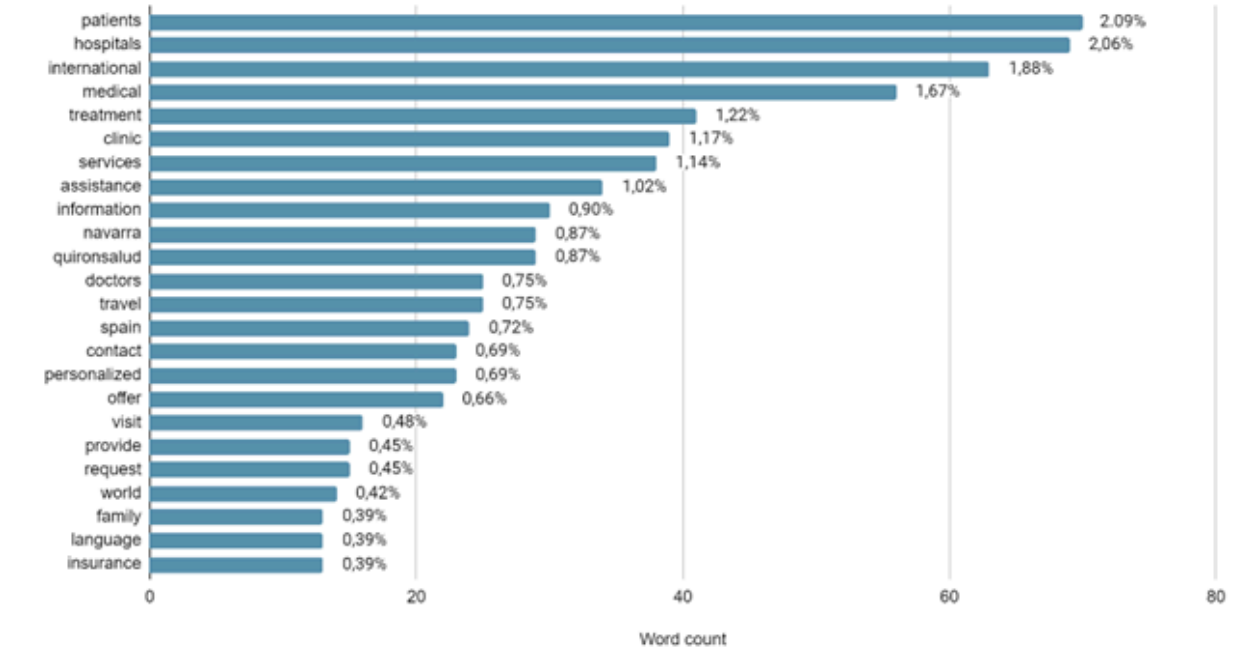
Source: Created by the author based on self-collected data.

Table 3 displays how the names of links related to destinations tourism information are presented on the website. Hospitals such as Fundación Valle de Lili, Bumrungrad International Hospital, and Johns Hopkins Hospital present information for medical tourists directly on the website, while others, like Quirón Salud and Hospital Pablo Tobón Uribe, provide these services directly to patients after contacting the hospital.

NVivo analysis revealed several key trends in hospitals websites with medical tourism sections, including the integration of tourism related information. Leading hospitals tend to prioritize an integrated presentation of both medical and tourism services on the platform, enhancing the overall experience for international patients by providing complete and easily accessible information.

The keyword's analysis of these hospital platforms reflects the most important aspects hospitals aim to communicate to potential medical tourists. They prioritize making key information visible and easily accessible, ensuring a user-friendly experience. This includes details on services, treatments, and destination tourism related information.

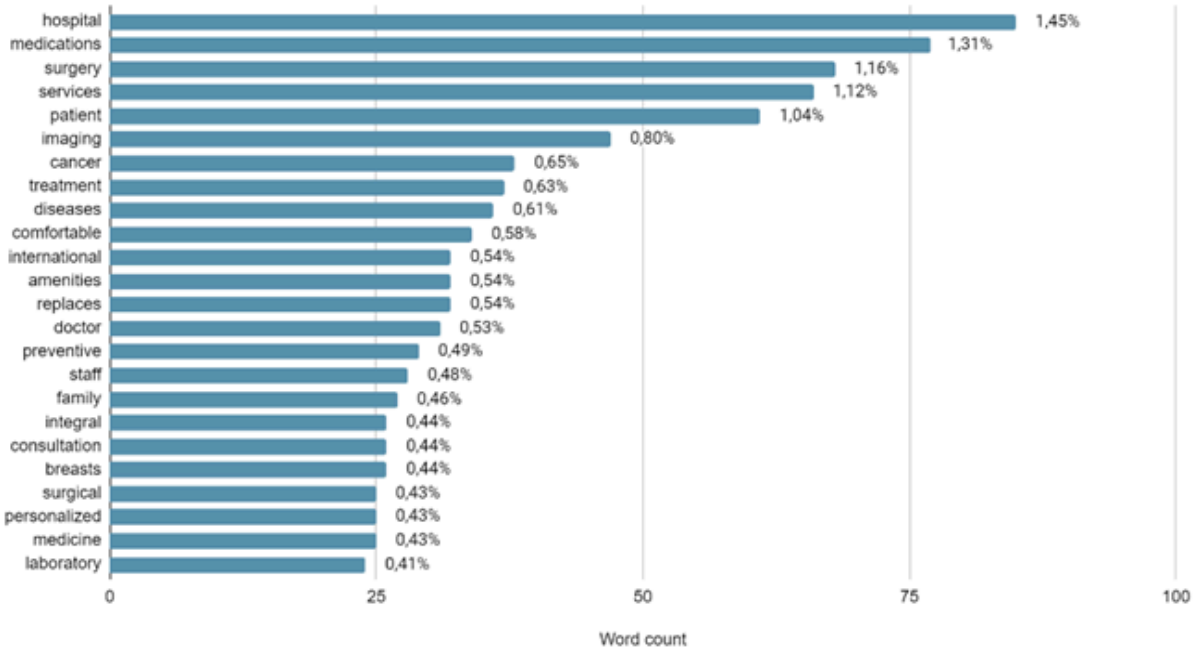
Figure 1. Word frequency and keyword trends on Spanish hospital websites

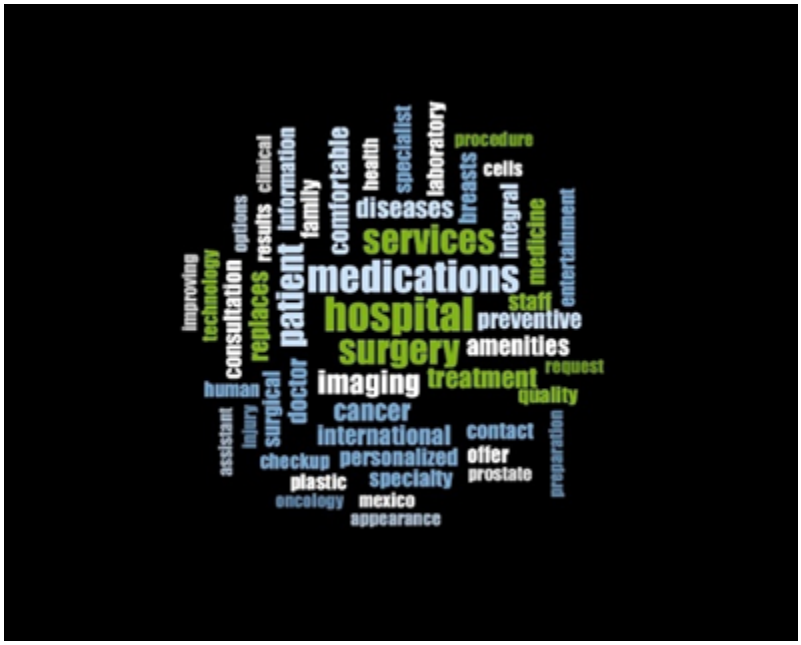


Source: Chart and word cloud created by the author based on self-collected data.

For Spanish hospitals, there's a strong interest in providing customized services for medical tourist.

Figure 2. Word frequency and keyword trends on Mexican hospital websites

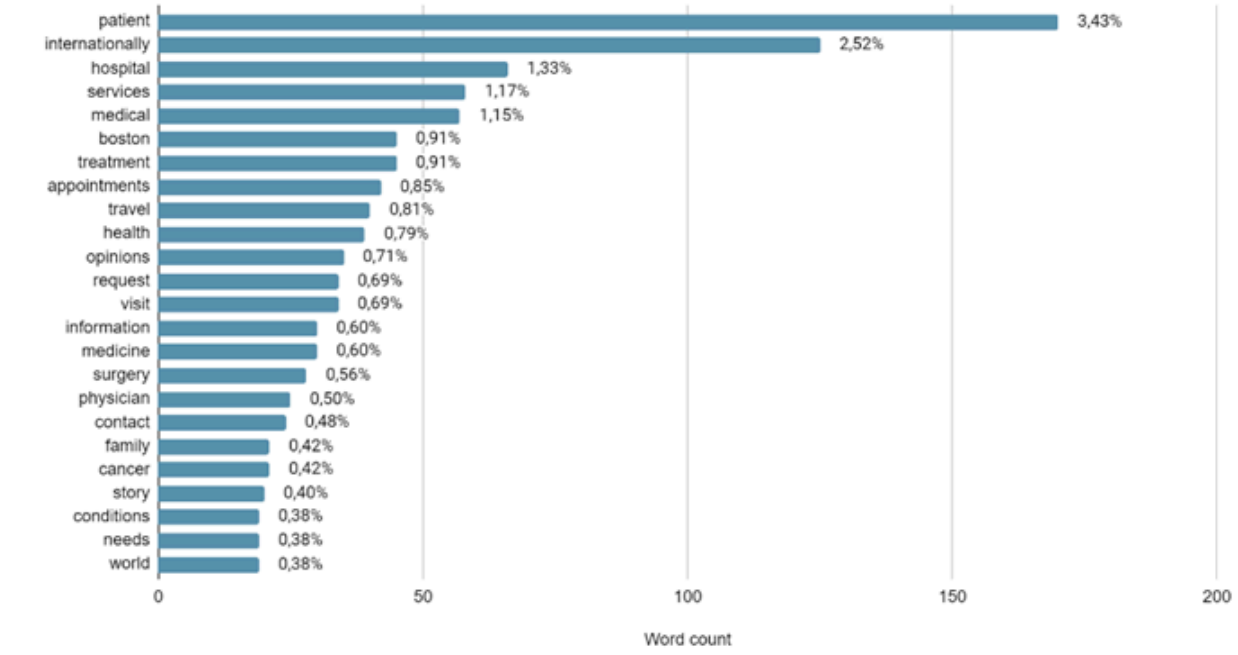




Source: Chart and word cloud created by the author based on self-collected data.

Mexican websites emphasize medical services, preventive care, and patient comfort.

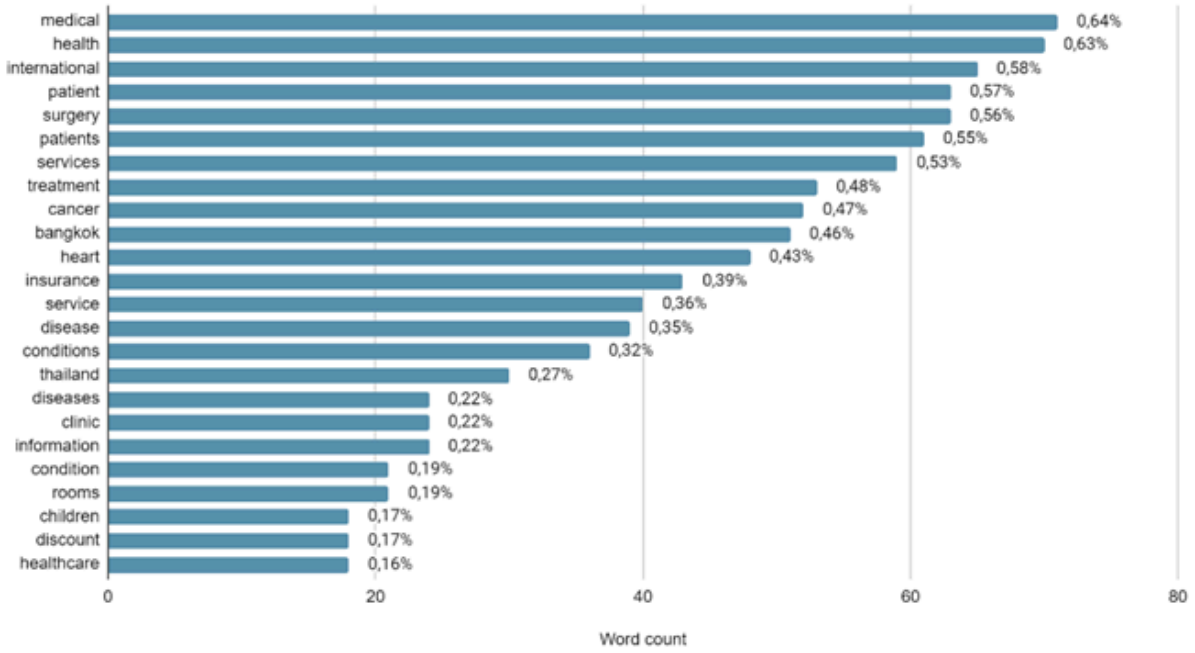
Figure 3. Word frequency and keyword trends on American hospital websites



Source: Chart and word cloud created by the author based on self-collected data.

American websites emphasize organized, personalized medical care and advanced treatments as their main selling points.

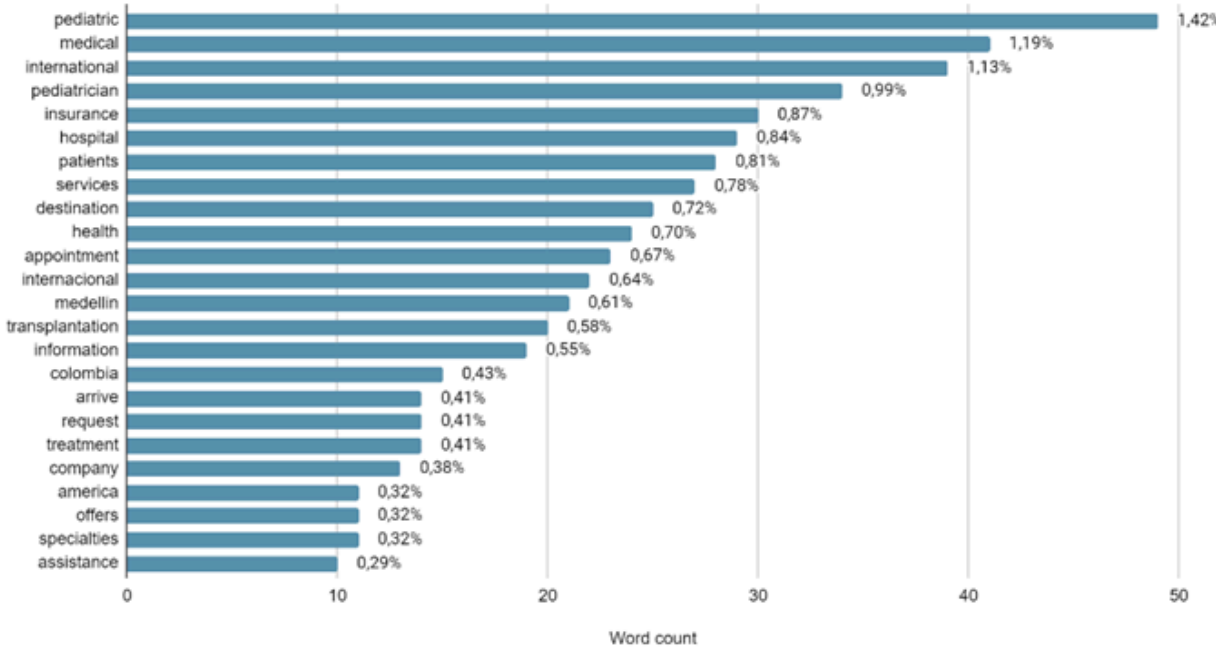
Figure 4. Word frequency and keyword trends on Thai hospital websites



Source: Chart and word cloud created by the author based on self-collected data.

For Thai hospitals, there is a focus on highlighting the capital city as a key hub for medical tourism while emphasizing high-end medical care and treatments.

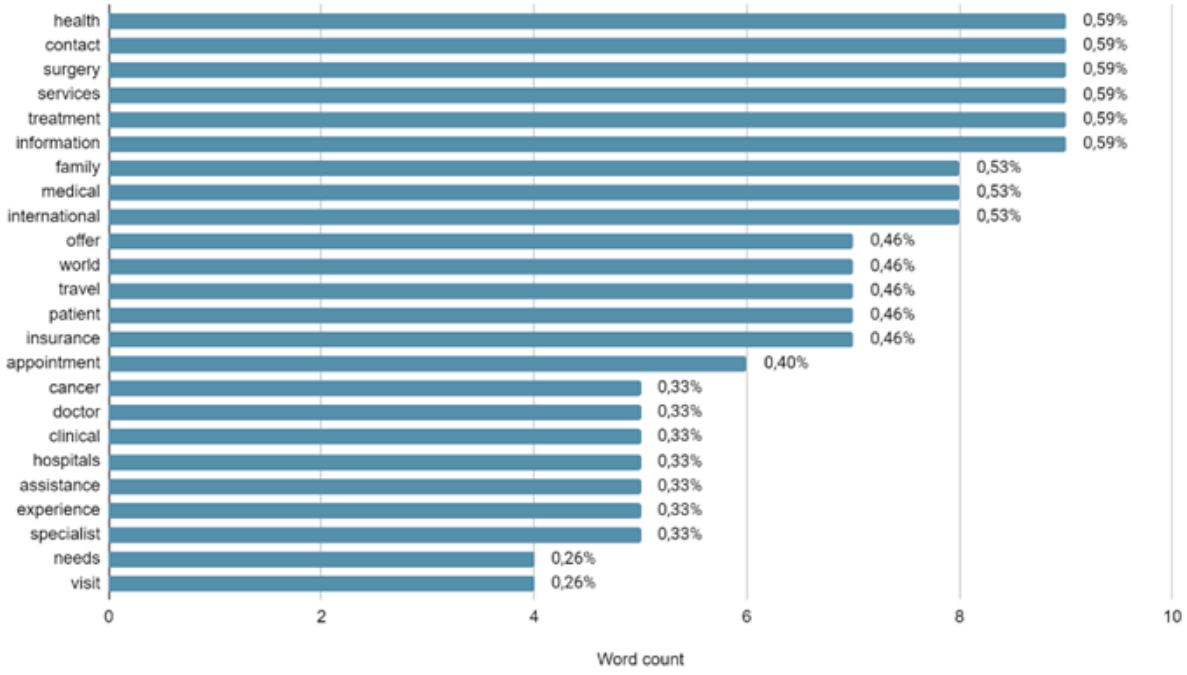
Figure 5. Word frequency and keyword trends on Colombian hospital websites



Source: Chart and word cloud created by the author based on self-collected data.

Colombian websites analysis suggests an approach that includes medical services, travel and financial considerations.

Figure 6. Word frequency and keyword trends on top hospital websites in different destinations



Source: Chart and word cloud created by the author based on self-collected data.

The word frequency analysis across hospital websites from the different selected countries (Thailand, Colombia, Mexico, US, Spain) highlighted common keywords such as "medical,"

"patient," "surgery," "hospital," and "international." In particular, for countries like The US and Thailand, the word "international" has a strong presence on their websites, reflecting the effort to prioritize the foreign market and position themselves as global healthcare providers.

These insights reveal a consistent focus among hospitals on emphasizing medical services and enhancing the international patient experience in their presentations of medical tourism, as seen in the previous figures.

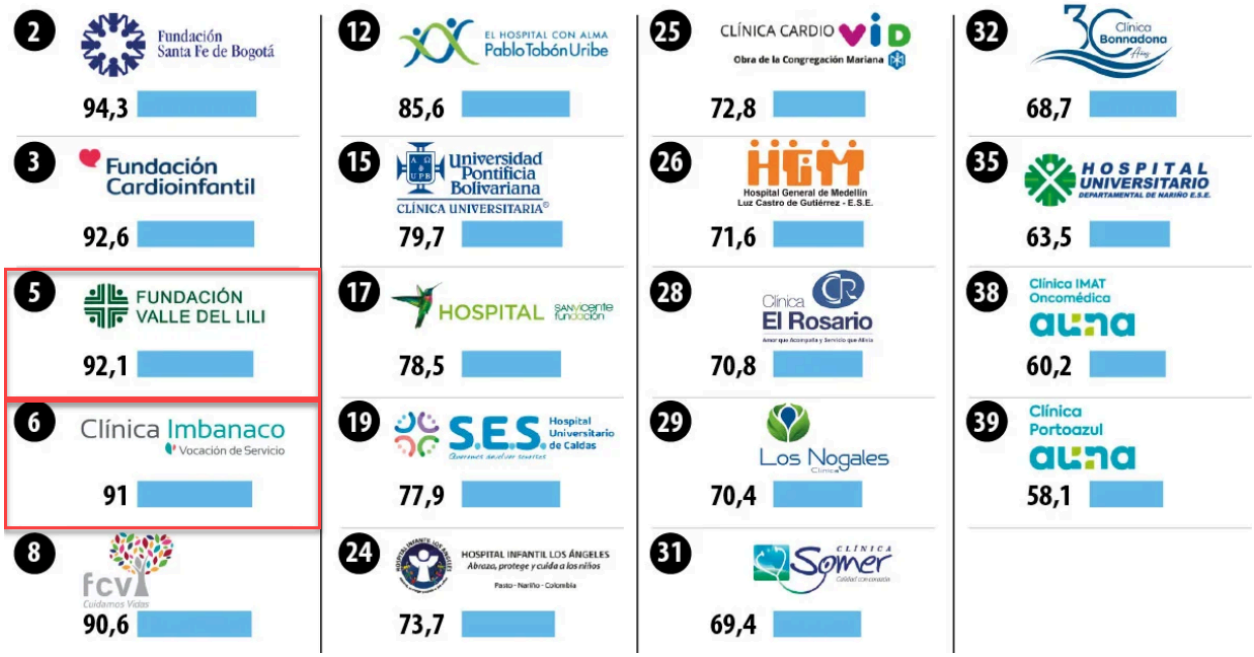
The keyword analysis shown in Figure 6, based on the medical services listed in Table 2, indicates that among the 50 most frequent words, at least one treatment, typically related to oncology or cardiology, is consistently represented across all institutions. Notably, Colombia stands out for its strong emphasis on pediatric care, while Thailand and Mexico demonstrate a focus on a range of specialties.

For tourism related information, the analysis highlighted the presence of words such as "travel" and terms related to accommodation. It also reflects different degrees of how hospitals incorporate tourism related information on their websites and the importance placed on displaying it (Table 3).

In destinations such as the US, Spain, and Thailand, an integrated presentation of medical and tourism services is evident. In contrast, emerging markets like Colombia tend to prioritize medical services, and there is a noticeable gap in providing a fully integrated online experience that includes tourism services. It is crucial for all websites to offer detailed and accessible information during the trip planning phase.

To gather more information of the landscape of the medical tourism sector, conversations were conducted with the heads of international patient offices at two of the top clinics in Latin America, ranked 5th and 6th in the regional rankings (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Rank of the best clinics and hospitals in Latin America (2023)



Source: LR, Ranking Latam Best Hospitals de LBC

The discussions revealed several gaps in the services provided by these clinics. While medical services are the primary focus, tourism services are mentioned on the websites, such as in the destination information section of Fundación Valle de Lili or the international patient care section at Imbanaco, but they do not have dedicated sections as these services are not managed directly by the hospital. These tourism services are primarily handled by external companies responsible for logistics. This reliance on external logistics agents may reduce patient trust, as they prefer having all services managed directly by the hospital to avoid additional steps and concerns.

The clinics have an international patient department with its own staff, including an international office director and bilingual support personnel. Both clinics serve more than 2,000 international patients annually, primarily from the United States, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and some from Europe. Patients are mostly referred by insurers, although a significant number also come privately. And also mentioned, the majority of the patients choose these services for the economic advantages and the quality of medical care.

The analysis reveals that not all hospitals prioritize showcasing destination tourism related information on their websites, highlighting a gap in the integration of tourism services within

medical tourism offerings. This suggests an opportunity for improvement in online strategies for the websites, allowing hospitals to play a more proactive role in providing essential travel information to international patients during the trip planning phase. However, all hospitals do offer fully guided personalized assistance once the medical tourism process begins, with a possibility of tourism related information provided upon request or through an external logistic agent.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of hospital websites across different countries has provided valuable insights for optimizing the overall patient experience and growth of the tourism industry, narrowing the gap in the integration of tourism services within the medical tourism industry. The following recommendations are proposed:

- Hospital websites are an important tool in the medical tourism industry, as they often serve as one of the patient's first points of contact. Therefore, websites should be highly user-friendly, with an intuitive design that provides clear, updated, and transparent information. This includes relevant details about medical services, treatments, pricing, tourism information, and FAQs. Simplifying access to such information can help reduce uncertainty, build trust, and support informed decision-making for prospective patients.

- A crucial element of a user-friendly experience is multilingual support. Websites and communications should accommodate multiple languages, starting with English. Offering information in several languages will expand the hospital’s market, attract a broader audience, and enhance patient satisfaction, pre-procedure, during procedure, and post-care phases.

- To enhance the integration of tourism services within medical tourism, hospitals must ensure that both medical and tourism related services are accessible through their websites. This could include detailed information about treatments and medical expertise, as well as travel logistics, accommodations, transportation, and local tourist attractions. Dedicated sections for these services can make it easier for international patients to plan their stay. Additionally, hospitals could create partnerships with local

tourism businesses to offer packages combining medical treatments with tourism experiences. Furthermore, developing a personalized travel assistance platform on the website, with an integrated booking system, would allow patients to arrange medical appointments, inquiries, and travel logistics in one place, significantly enhancing convenience and satisfaction.

- Providing personalized travel assistance, including destination guides, local attractions, leisure activities, transportation, hotel bookings, and visa support, can optimize the medical tourist experience. Having a dedicated medical coordinator or trip planner to assist patients throughout the process will further enhance the overall patient experience.

- Hospitals could offer a dedicated post-treatment section that focuses on recovery options within the destination. For patients who choose to stay and recover at the destination, this could include recommendations for recovery friendly accommodations, leisure activities suitable for recuperating patients, and follow-up consultations. This ensures continuity of care, even after patients return home.

- Hospitals should provide exceptional customer service, using their websites as a key tool. This includes improving communication features such as live chat support, virtual consultations, and multilingual representatives. These services will ensure that international patients have access to accurate information and guidance, which fosters trust. Additionally, implementing feedback mechanisms can offer valuable insights into patient experiences and help improve both medical and tourism related services.

- Hospitals should also focus on enhancing their digital marketing strategies, particularly search engine optimization (SEO), to reach potential patients, improve visibility in search engine results, and simultaneously promote the destination.

8. LIMITATION AND FUTURE LINES OF RESEARCH

The study focuses on hospitals from leading medical tourism destinations and one emerging market. The analysis is limited to the information available on the hospital's websites, which may not fully capture internal strategies or reflect all services, and may include outdated data.

Additionally, the conversations held with the two international patient office heads in Colombia may not fully represent the broader situation, as the sector is growing, and it can variate across the different regions in the industry.

For future research, a patient-centered survey (see Annex 1) is under review by the legal department of the hospital Fundación Valle de Lili (Colombia). Once approved, it will explore patient experiences in more depth, providing insight into overall satisfaction and areas for improvement.

9. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has examined the integration of medical tourism offerings by hospitals, focusing on both leading and emerging destinations. By analyzing how hospitals integrate and present their services online, and how these digital platforms shape the patient experience. The study make notice there are differences in how hospitals from different regions present their medical tourism services, which suggest there's room for improvement for standardizing the presentation of information across institutions to align medical and tourism services more effectively. Additionally, hospitals can use digital tools to enhance patient engagement and overall satisfaction.

For patients, hospital websites are often the first point of contact when exploring medical tourism options. These digital platforms serve as essential communication channels, not only for sharing medical information, but also for promoting tourism related services. It is crucial for hospitals to maintain this line of communication with prospective medical tourists, ensuring that they present accurate, detailed, and easy to navigate content. Good communication practices are key strategies to effectively reach and engage potential patients. By fostering strong online communication, hospitals, can significantly influence a patient's decision-making process and improve their initial experience.

One of the main findings of this research is that improving the patient experience requires hospitals to incorporate both medical and tourism related information on their websites. As the medical experience is paramount, integrating tourism related services in collaboration with local tourism entities can further enrich the overall patient journey. Offering information about the destination's cultural, recreational, and leisure opportunities adds value to the treatment experience, making it more attractive for international patients.

By identifying these gaps, this study offers practical recommendations for hospitals aiming to improve their medical tourism offerings. Hospitals should focus on improving the usability of their websites, offering multilingual support, and providing detailed information about tourism services. These strategies are critical for enhancing patient satisfaction and engagement. Additionally, hospitals in emerging markets could benefit from stronger partnerships with local tourism boards to create a more integrated approach, as seen in more developed markets.

In terms of contributions to the field, this thesis provides actionable insights for healthcare institutions looking to strengthen their medical tourism strategies. It also creates new opportunities for research, particularly in exploring how hospitals can more effectively collaborate with tourism entities to enhance patient satisfaction. By closing the gap between medical and tourism services, hospitals have the potential to create a seamless and enriched experience for international patients.

In conclusion, the integration of medical tourism offerings is a critical factor in the success of hospitals in the global medical tourism market. By addressing the identified gaps and implementing the recommended strategies, hospitals can improve their appeal to international patients, enhance the overall patient experience, and compete in the field of medical tourism.

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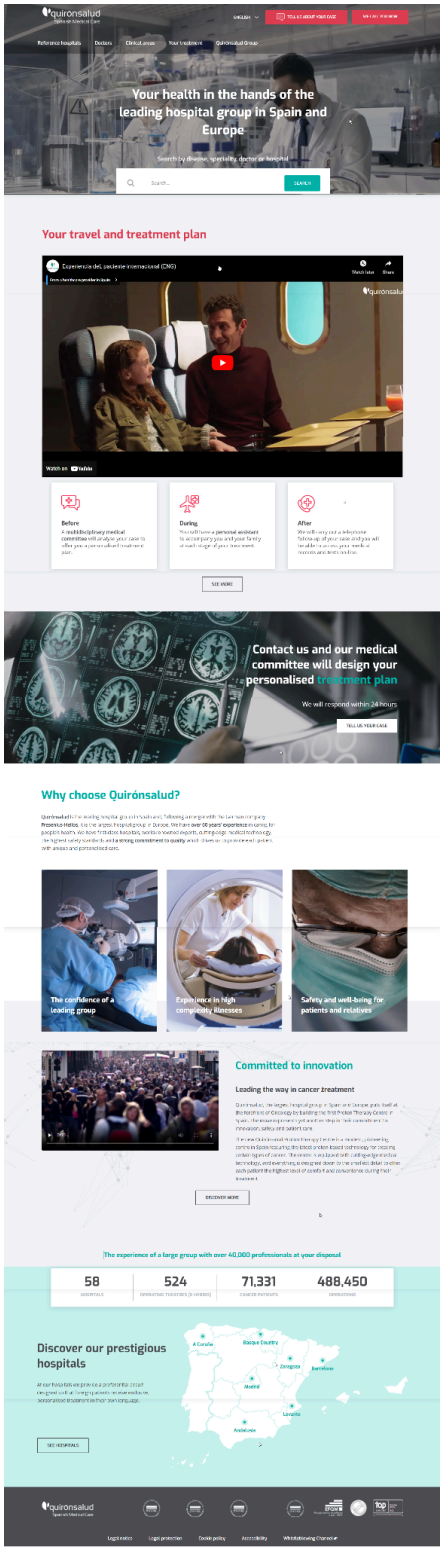
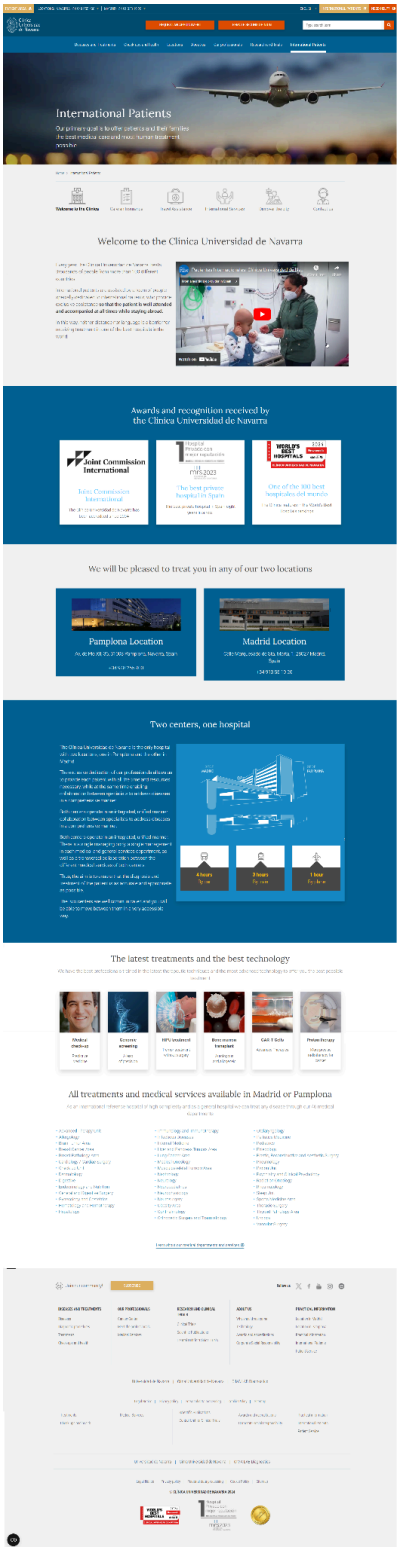
11. ANNEXES

11.1 ANNEX 1: HOSPITALS WEBSITES ANALYZED:

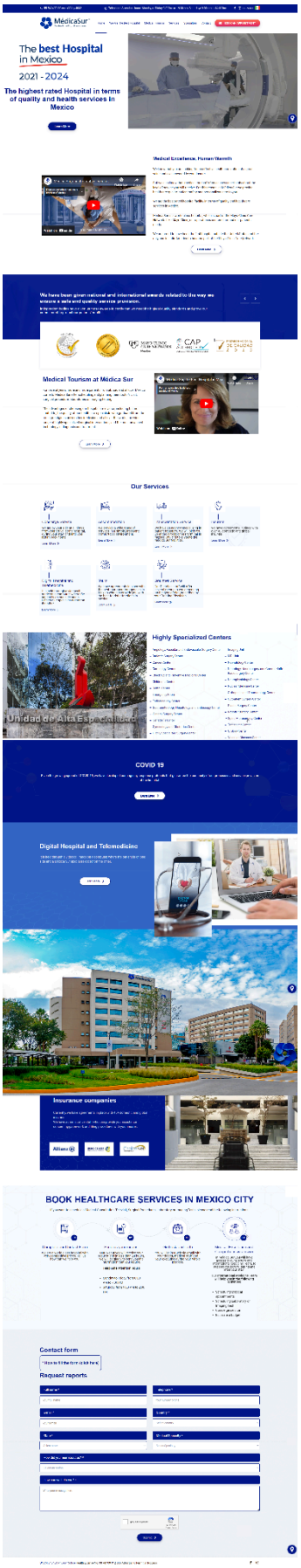
Clínica Quirón salud, Spain



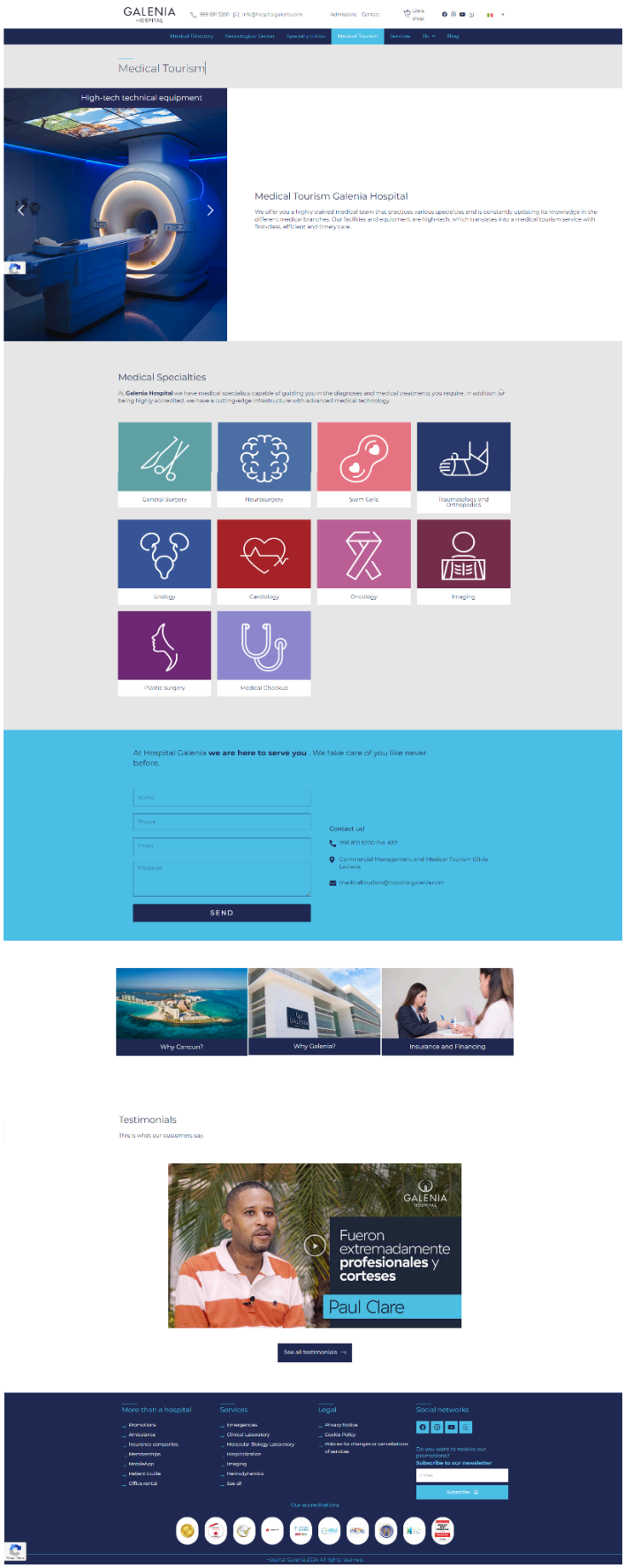
Clínica Universidad de Navarra, Spain



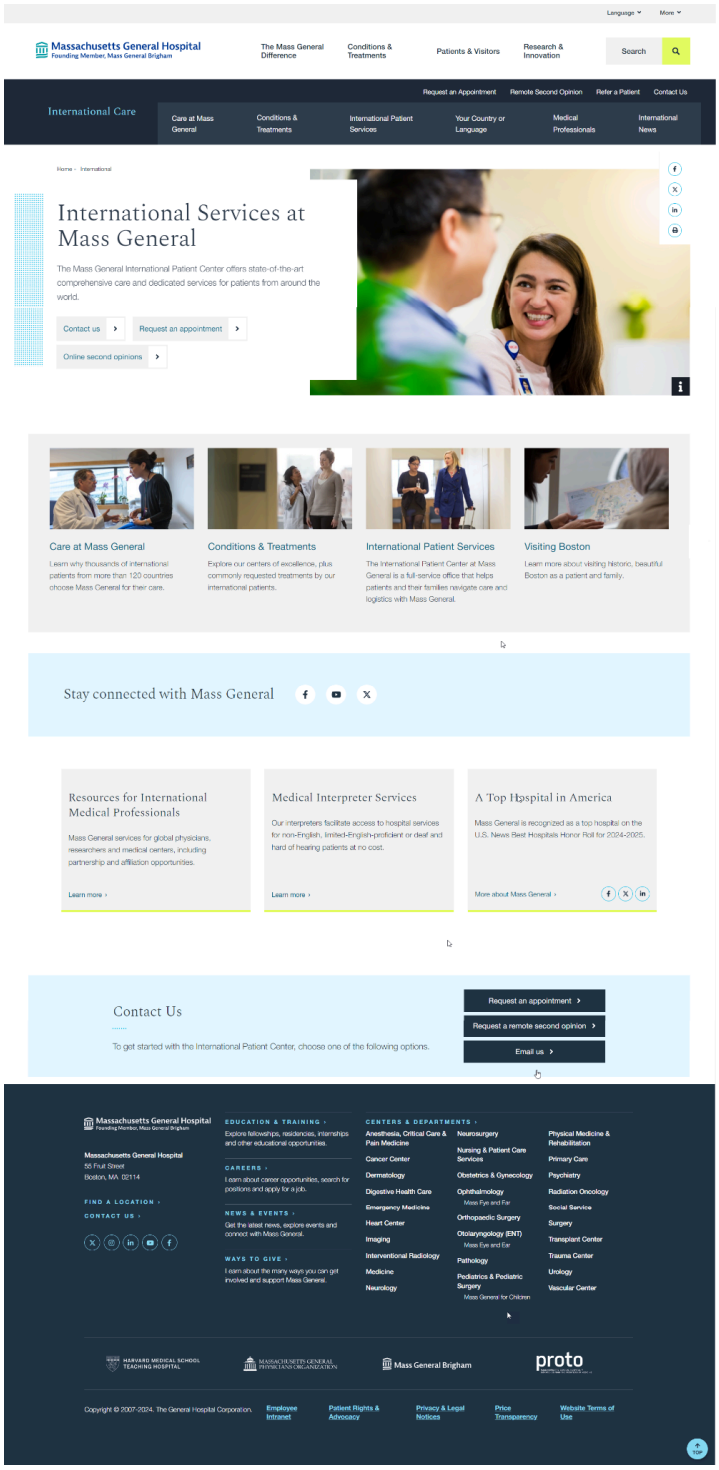
Hospital Médica Sur, Mexico



Hospital Galenia, Mexico

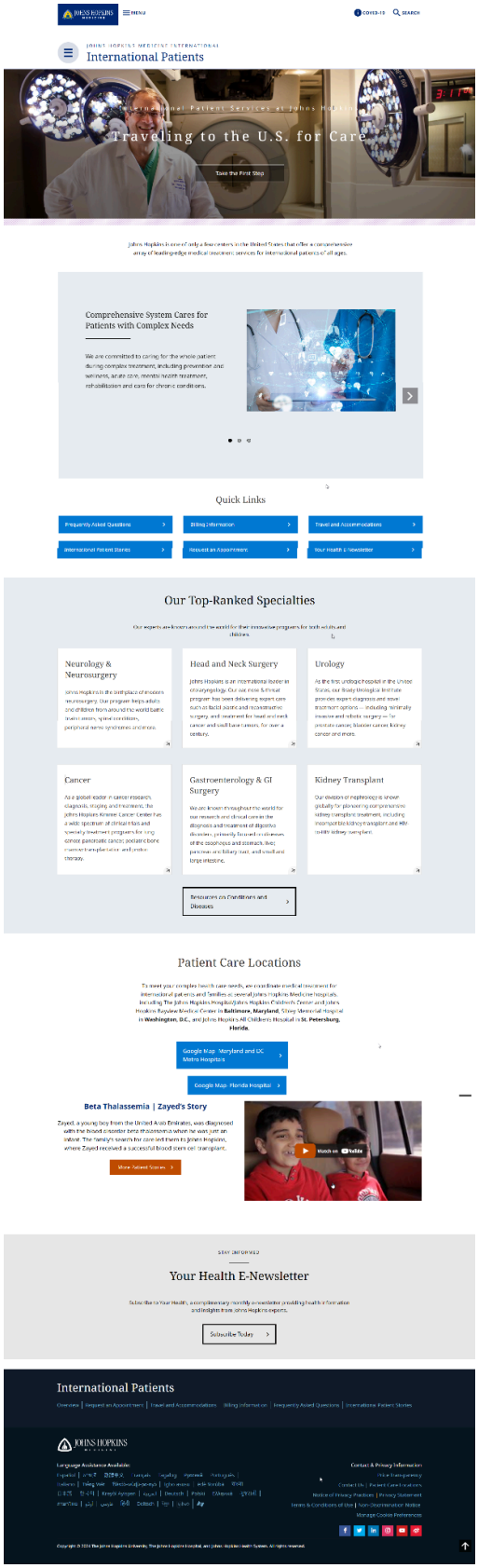


Massachusetts General Hospital, US

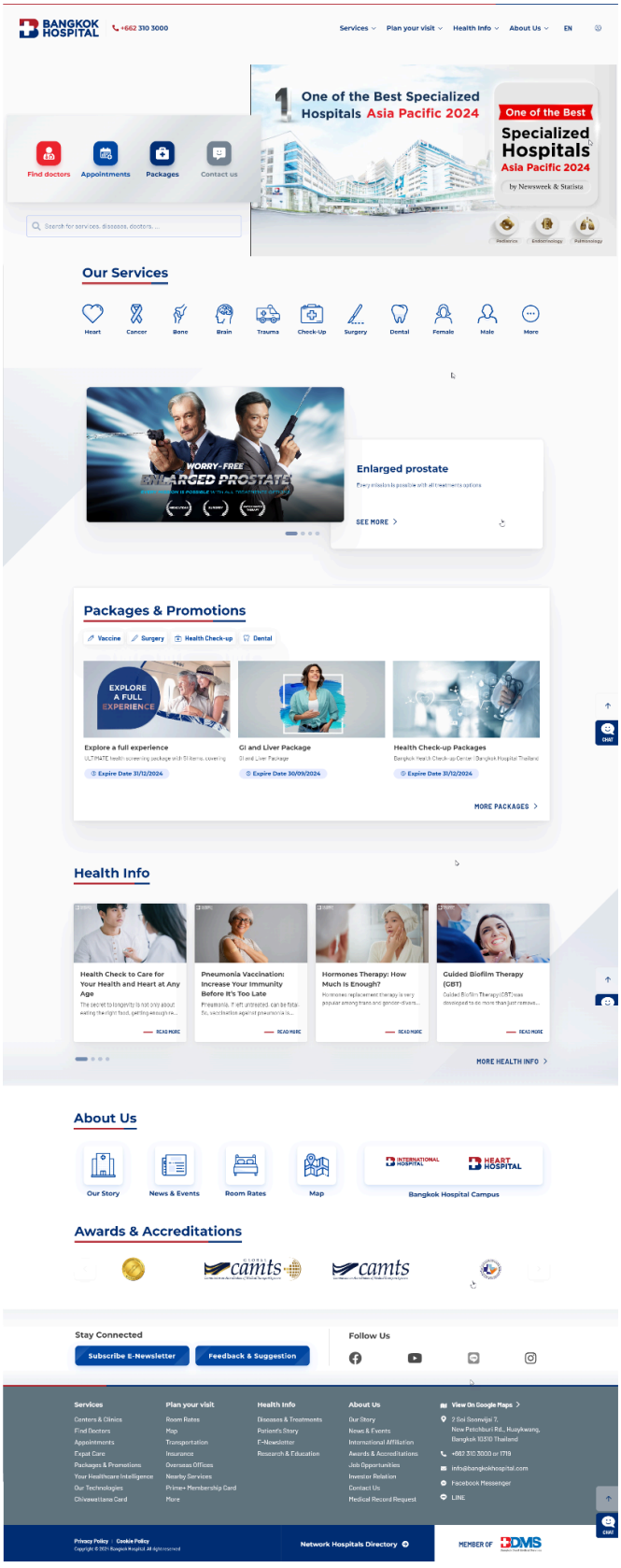


+

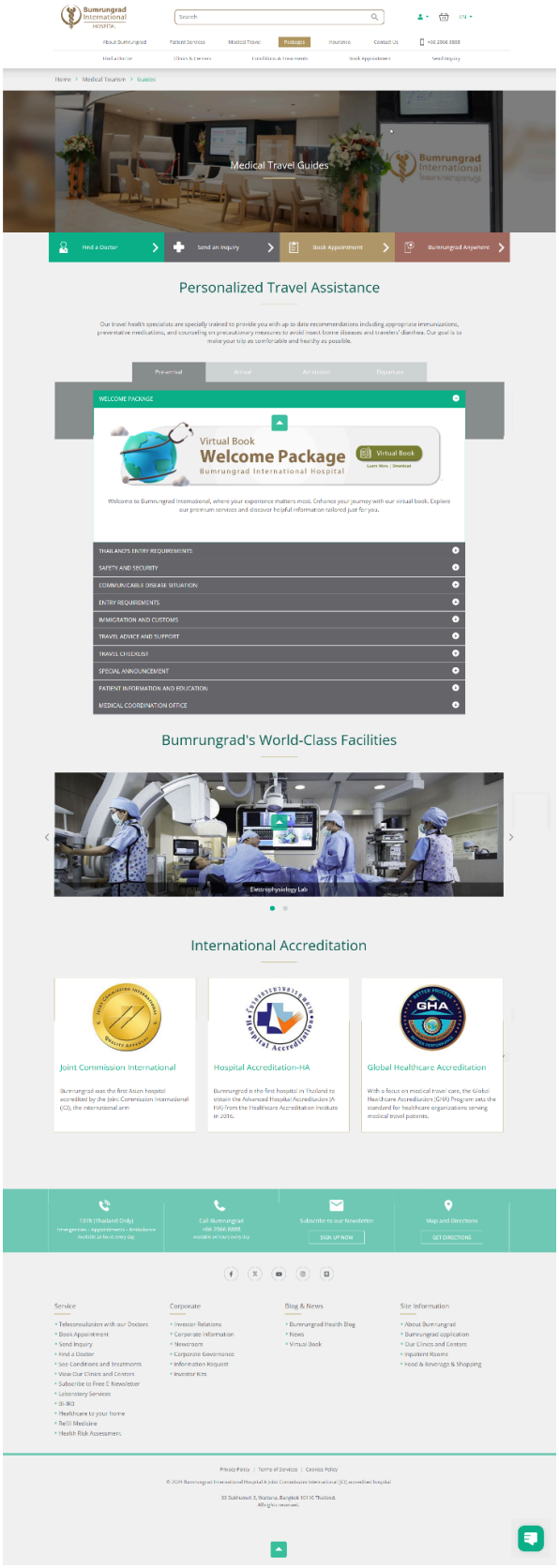
Johns Hopkins Hospital, US



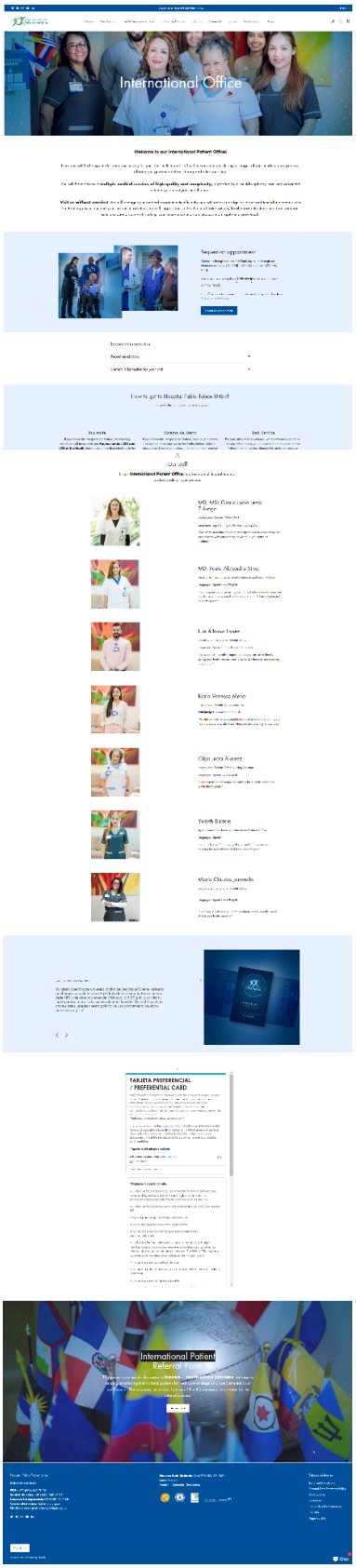
Bangkok Hospital Medical Center, Thailand



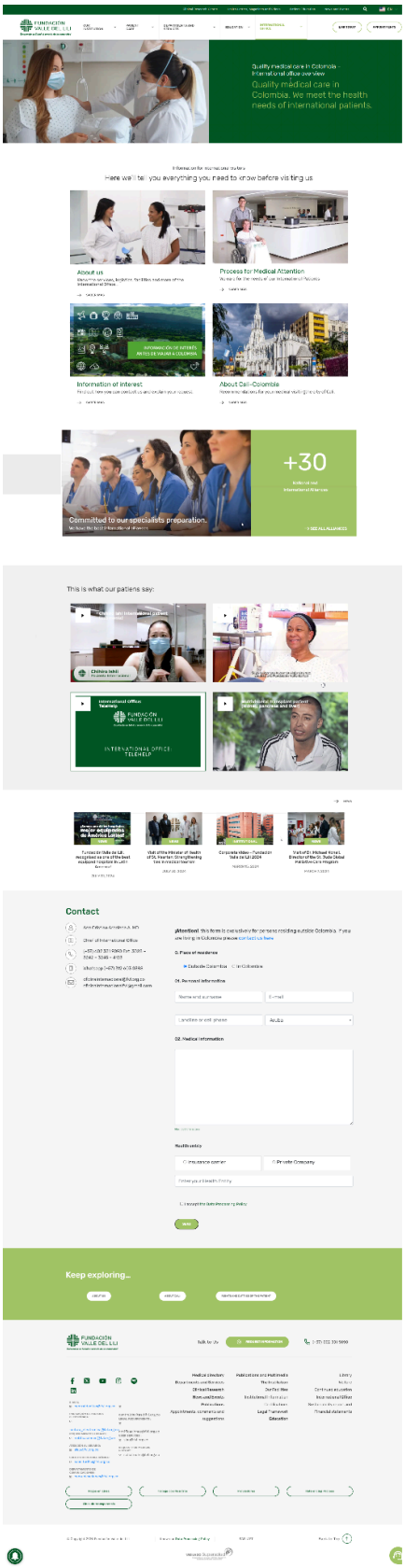
Bumrungrad International Hospital, Thailand



Hospital Pablo Tobón Uribe, Colombia



Fundación Valle de Lili, Colombia



11.2 ANNEX 2: PATIENT-CENTERED SURVEY

Medical tourism customer experience

This questionnaire is part of the research for a master thesis in Management of tourism destinations. It aims to gather insights from patients who have participated in medical tourism. Your responses will help improve the services provided and enhance the overall experience for future medical tourists.

Please note: the information you provide will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and will be used only for academic purposes. Your participation is highly valued and will contribute significantly to the success of this research study.

* Indicates required question

1. Hospital/Clinic name where you received your medical procedure? *

2. Duration of stay: *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Less than a week
- ◯ 1-2 weeks
- ◯ More than 2 weeks

3. Accompanying family members or companions: *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

4. Previous experience with medical tourism, if any:

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Section 2

5. 1. Were you referred to this hospital by your insurance company?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

6. 2. What factors influenced your decision to explore medical tourism options? (Select all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Accreditations and certifications
- ☐ Aftercare services
- ☐ Cost savings
- ☐ Patient testimonials
- ☐ Quality of care
- ☐ Shorter waiting times
- ☐ Specific medical expertise
- ☐ Treatment details
- ☐ Other: _____

7. 3. Could you please specify the procedure you underwent? (Select all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Dental Surgery
- [ ] Cosmetic Surgery
- [ ] Orthopedic Surgery
- [ ] Cardiovascular Treatment
- [ ] Bariatric Treatment
- [ ] Fertility Treatment
- [ ] Organ Transplant
- [ ] Oncology Treatment
- [ ] Other: _____

8. 4. How did you find information about the hospital?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Internet searches
- ◯ Medical tourism websites or directories
- ◯ Recommendations from peers or family members
- ◯ Other: _____

9. 5. Did you visit the hospital's website to gather information about their medical tourism offerings?
If not, please continue to Q8.

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

10. 6. What specific information were you looking for? (Select all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Accommodation and transportation assistance
- [ ] Accreditation and certifications
- [ ] Description of medical procedures offered
- [ ] Patient testimonials or reviews
- [ ] Pricing and payment options
- [ ] Other: _____

11. 7. How would you rate the ease of finding relevant and clear information about medical tourism services on the hospital website?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very difficult

12. 8. Were there any aspects of the information provided by the hospital during the decision-making process or pre-procedure that you found particularly helpful or lacking?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. 9. How satisfied were you with the information available during the procedure phase (e.g., scheduling, communication with medical staff)?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very satisfied

14. 10. Did the hospital provide sufficient support, information, and follow-up during the post-procedure stage?
If no, please elaborate.

15. 11. Do you believe that support, information, and follow-up after the procedure are important for the overall customer experience? Please explain how these aspects enhance or detract from your full experience.

16. 12. Have you encountered any online features or services on hospital websites that significantly improved your experience as a medical tourist?
If yes, please elaborate.

17. 13. Do you believe that hospitals should play a role in providing tourism-related information and services to medical tourists?
Please elaborate.

18. 14. How important do you consider the online presence of hospitals in influencing your decision to choose a medical tourism destination?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very important

Section 3

19. 1. What types of activities did you participate in during your stay? (Select all that apply)

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Cultural events
- [ ] Dining out
- [ ] Relaxation and spa
- [ ] Shopping
- [ ] Sightseeing tours
- [ ] None
- [ ] Other: _____

20. 2. If you did not participate in any activities, what were the main reasons?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Cost
- ◯ Medical condition
- ◯ Lack of information
- ◯ Time constraints
- ◯ Other: _____

21. 3. Did you spend any time at the destination before the procedure?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

22. 4. Did you spend more days at the destination after the procedure?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

23. 5. When would be the best time for the hospital to offer tourism options?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Before the procedure
- ◯ After the procedure
- ◯ Both
- ◯ Other: _____

Section 4

24. 1. Overall satisfaction with the entire medical tourism experience.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very satisfied

25. Additional feedback, comments, or suggestions:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Section 5

26. Full Name:

_____

27. Age: *

_____

28. Gender: *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Female
- ◯ Male
- ◯ Other: _____

29. Nationality:

_____

30. Country of residence: *

_____

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