Foreword

HEALTH OF MIND AND BODY, A CRITICALLY IMPORTANT FEATURE OF MEDICAL TOURISM

There are several reasons why including the health of both mind and body in reference to medical treatment would be beneficial, and they are well-brought out in this important book. First, travel makes a person grow up. From ancient times Japanese and other societies have been told that social interactions are extremely important in the human journey. There is one proverb in Japan: “A person will grow up better, if they travel”. In this context, travel is expressed as “experiences, trials, and so on”. This simply means that human interaction is critical for development, and that this interaction gives hope to the individual. Therefore, medical tourists should expect to be much better physically and mentally after their travel experiences. In other words, we can use tourism to achieve personal growth, but this is best when it is with people. Realizing that this will be even more important in respect of coping with the various experiences associated with travel for medical purposes is a major contribution of this book.

The second reason is found in the effect of relaxation. Seeking a mild climate, summer and winter, has been an objective of travel from old. Hotel, sanatorium, resort and inn extended stays at the seaside in clean air and a mild climate, or in mountainous areas, or near hot springs are thus also important. In the mental environment, a sickly person or people in poor physical and mental condition who are tired can regain health, while slowly, calmly regaining the vitality from taking rest in mind and body. The hot springs of Beppu in Japan, for example, are available in many nursing homes, recreation facilities, inns or hotels in that city, and, the benefits are considerable (even for short stay tourists). Medical tourists can stay longer; as their needs in this area will be greater. Even from the time when farming was the occupation of the majority of the Japanese people, after major events like planting and harvest (and war), a very important resource for several days rest for the farmers and soldiers was the nearby hot spring hotel. This has been a custom since ancient times. It was well-known that using such resources on a regular basis was the key to relaxing the mind and body, healing diseases and wounds, and would give on return a new energy to a tired person. The third reason is to be found in the refreshing effect of the actual journey. This is generally realized by people who travel. Come back from a trip and the feeling is often: “tired but it was fun”; and “after all, my home place is nice!” We often hear such words, but the refreshing effect of travel is also well recognized. The journey itself is rejuvenating, and people can more easily return to daily life after it, but so are the experiences gained by travel. Trips that visit landmarks,
nature, sea and mountain, make a journey through different climates and cultures, away from everyday life, are important to the refreshing of mind and body for every traveler. Often, a new life energy is obtained and associated with the trip and its activation of mind and body experiences. This is also the case with those people who travel for medical reasons, even if their immediate physical or mental condition does not allow the full benefits of travel to be gained until the medical treatment has been undergone.

MEDICAL TOURISM

We can thus think of medical tourism as containing travel and medical elements that include psychological wellbeing as well as generic medical treatment. Illness or injury recovery is as important as the goals of disease prevention and health maintenance and promotion, but even more so when a person has been subjected to a medical procedure. The travel component contributes to the maintenance and improvement of health in mind and body, and this can be a fundamental contribution, but it can also be a problem for the ill traveler. For example, it is possible that travel becomes rather detrimental if it includes too harsh a journey, or too anxious a journey, or when the travel does not fit the individual needs of a traveler. However, these situations should not be allowed to impact on the search for answers to a medical problem or service cost/delay factors requiring travel, because mental and physical health go together, and this is critical for the success of the medical treatment.

So, to bring out the utility of the journey, and to minimize the negative effects for beneficial outcomes requires a clinical psychological (health and welfare) approach as well as a medical procedure approach. As is mentioned in several of the chapters in this comprehensive and practical book, practical studies that apply the psychological and other health and wellness techniques that are available to ensure the health of the human mind, are also necessary during the recovery phase of medical and surgical procedures. Not only psychological knowledge, clinical psychological findings and assistance from experts to mobilize knowledge in related fields, including health psychology, social psychology, community psychology, psychopathology and psychiatry, and/or psychosomatic medicine, are of use in targeting mental health and self-realization. Thus, the clinical psychology perspective, planning and management, and combination with tourism are considered very useful in achieving effective clinical psychological interventions and assistance to the medical side in the domestic situation, but can also be used to raise the benefits from medical tourism.

MEDICAL TOURISM AND CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

However, in many countries including Japan clinical psychologists do not as yet join doctors in the medical tourism field as normal practice. However, they can of course intervene at a particular facility if necessary to assist the medical service to function to more effectively on a case-by-case basis. So it is worth looking next at some points of connection and concrete roles for clinical psychologists in this emerging field:

1. Assessment of tour plans: Participation in the planning phase, assessments on the effects and aims of the projects;
Foreword

2. Helping to understand the needs of and matching of the target audience to the planned treatment: Checking the gap between the target audience and the planners, and whether the target audience can understand what is being offered;
3. In the implementation process itself, being involved in fine tuning project management to suit patient needs, and possible needs in an evolving situation: Psychologists may know that sometimes the audience needs additional support in order to recover or be at ease with a proposed treatment;
4. Assessment and monitoring of expectations and anxieties in the target audience: If it is necessary to check mental condition, how to respond to these problems, what is the level of anxiety, and so on. At the point of treatment, assist the medical side to understand audience expectations, provide anxiety assessments and monitor patient expectations to meet situations, help to reduce fear, or to continue the monitoring and assessment of necessary psychological status, so as to reduce anticipation problems and anxiety over probable treatment outcome issues;
5. Intervention to reduce frustration and anxiety assessment and monitoring before procedures, how to intervene appropriately when necessary, adjustments in counselling and providing information between the parties concerned during and after the medical procedure; and
6. Providing needed feedback to managers, including feedback to health care providers and the patients concerned.

Determining what kind of planning and/or intervention that is or may become necessary in respect of these six roles, is the specific task of the clinical psychologist. As noted in Chapter 1, there are various levels of medical tourism. The most important benefit of health and wellness tourism added to the medical factor is that it may allow for greater enjoyment and easier recovery. The impact of the medical factor is greater if there is a large gap between hope and anxiety, i.e., the patient is psychologically prone to instability. A clinical psychologist is needed in this situation. In other words, roles (5), (6) of the above list may be the most important reasons for such intervention. Thus, while medical treatment plans are usually the prime reason for seeking out alternative suppliers and destinations, counselling, care giving, and health and wellness treatments are also critical to recovery. Even though in Japan and other parts of the world the clinical psychologist’s involvement in this field of activity is still in its infancy, it can be seen as an important factor in the delivery of better and more appropriate medical procedures in collaboration with other stakeholders. The authors contributing to this book understand the importance of health and wellness to the practice of medicine, and the understanding of medical tourism will benefit from their work.

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