

# **RSOG Seminar**

## **“Malaysian Healthcare Tourism Transformation: My Experience”**

with

**Dr. Mary Wong Lai Lin**

**When** : 21 November 2014  
**Where** : Razak School of Government  
**Speakers** : Dr. Mary Wong Lai Lin

### **About The Seminar**

Over the years, Malaysia has grown to become one of the preferred healthcare travel destinations in Asia. International Living Index has ranked Malaysia as the 3rd best healthcare and medical tourism destination in Asia in 2014; Nomad Capitalist has placed Malaysia as one of the top 5 destinations in the world for medical tourism; and CNBC and Patients Beyond Borders, have both placed Malaysia among the top 10 health tourism destinations in the world in the same year.

The Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) has successfully navigated this development, under the tagline, “Quality Care for Your Peace of Mind”. Behind MHTC’s success was its dynamic leader, Dr Mary Wong Lai Lin. She was instrumental in corporatizing the agency in 2011, and in the short span of 3 years, steered it towards becoming a progressive organization with 3 overseas offices. Its track record in increasing medical tourism has been phenomenal where healthcare travellers to Malaysia increased from 392,000 in 2010 to 770,000 in 2013.

In this seminar, she will share her experiences and achievements thus far in positioning Malaysia as the preferred destination for world-class healthcare services.

### **Summary**

Medical tourism is a rising multibillion-dollar industry. Through active promotional campaign, the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) has opened up a new era of

medical tourism in Malaysia. This is also due to existing excellent medical delivery and stable social, political, and economic climate. However, there are still many issues that can be improved to increase our competitiveness in medical tourism, such as equipping medical staff with customer service skills and tackling the issue of brain drain.

### **Medical climate**

Healthcare/medical tourism is a multibillion-dollar industry and is rising quickly in the international market. Deloitte 2008 report stated that medical tourism was worth at USD60 billion with a double-digit growth rate. Frost and Sullivan as well as Baker and McKenzie estimated the growth was at USD100 billion in 2012. It is important to note that data on medical tourism is specific to each country. Each country have their own set of data and as such, it cannot be utilised for comparative purposes due to different definitions utilised and difficulty in obtaining data from destination countries.

According to Deloitte, global healthcare cost is rising at 8% per annum in the next decade. Developed countries such as United States and United Kingdom have high demands for healthcare, but the services are not readily accessible nor affordable to their citizens because of high health insurance cost and long waiting list. While developing countries like China and Bangladesh have conditional health insurance and those at a higher income bracket would opt for treatment overseas. It is believed that treatment overseas is cheaper, faster, readily available with more choices, and option for better doctors. A plus point to this approach is that it is very much holiday-driven, packaged as holistic recovery. Crucially important, differences in healthcare standards between countries resulted in a net movement for medical tourism. Together with aging world population (above 50 years old), which is also the group that is mostly likely to spend on goods and services, the industry is expected to expand further in the future.

### **Role of MHTC**

MHTC was launched by the Prime Minister of Malaysia on 21st December 2009 and was corporatized on 10th October 2011 under the Ministry of Health Malaysia. Its role include:

- To formulate and execute a strategic plan for the promotion of health services in Malaysia
- To promote smart partnerships between the government and healthcare industry stakeholders
- To provide a “one stop centre” on all matters related to health tourism
- To provide coordination for promotional activities for Malaysian healthcare providers and related stakeholders
- To undertake research activities related to the promotion of health services

- To establish a database to support research and planning activities

MHTC constantly engages in promotional activities such as seminars, exhibitions, and talks to sustain the growth of healthcare traveller to Malaysia. Collaborating with Malaysian embassies abroad and customs offices, MHTC promotional packages manage to boost health tourism by providing health tourist direct assistance to treatment from the airport to any private hospital of their choice.

### **Why Malaysia?**

Factors that make Malaysia an attractive healthcare destination are accessibility, stable political climate, clear and strong regulatory policies as it reflects the mature healthcare system, hospital facilities and doctors are of international standards, minimal language barrier, reasonable and competitive pricing, and other tourism offerings. Some of the popular treatments sought by health tourists include cardiology, oncology, orthopedics, and gynecology. Interestingly, foreigners from developing countries constitutes most of our healthcare tourists.

### **Challenges**

Malaysia is facing a brain drain phenomenon amongst its skilful doctors. Specialist doctors tend to move abroad in search of better income and benefits. In addition, service delivery and customer service need to be further improved as there is a gap that exists. The speaker highlights the importance of training workers with soft skills in communicating effectively with foreign patients.

### **Issues Raised**

- Medical tourism in Malaysia is rising and has a bright future. Our niche market is expected to expand beyond neighbouring countries.
- It is important to receive government support and to have stable social, political, and economic climate.
- Front line workers in the healthcare industry need to be equipped with soft skills training, especially language and communication.
- There is a need to have a specialized brand and attractive packages to stay competitive in the market.

### **About the Speaker**

Dr Mary Wong Lai Lin was formerly the Chief Executive Officer of the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC), the primary agency set up to develop and promote Malaysia's healthcare travel industry. She has extensive experience in healthcare

management and planning, having served in various capacities within the Ministry of Health, both at state and federal levels. At the Ministry, she was involved in planning, implementing and evaluating health policies and programmes. She holds a law degree from the University of London, a master's degree in Health Services Management from the University of Manchester, and a doctorate in Health Policy, Economics and Financing from the National University of Singapore.

### **Contact**

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