

# Emotional Geographies of International Medical Travel

*Imaginations, Experiences and Performances of Care and Hospitality in the Context of Commercialized Health Care*

## Project Details

### In a Nutshell

The project investigates the commercialization and globalization of health care services. Patients and clinics are viewed as central actors, who generate this market through their discursive and material practices.

The project examines how these actors deal with competing rationales of efficiency and empathy, attentive care and costs.



### Relevance

Global traveling for medical treatment will continue to expand and become a normal practice. It is astonishing how little we know about the functioning of health care we are about to out-source and the effects this has on patients.

### Objectives

To analyze the emotional aspects involved in medical mobilities. This will allow drawing a more comprehensive picture of global health care and contributing to a better understanding of what it means to become mobile for health.

### Case Studies



Two key players in global health care have been chosen: the USA and India.

### Established Collaborations

University of California, Berkeley, Anthropology Department (host institute). Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health. Additional contacts in Chennai, Wageningen, Bonn.

## Why Traveling for Health?

The costs of Northern health care systems are rising, while austerity programs are cutting state expenditures for health. Cost differentials for health services between the Global South and North are immense. Therefore, patients and insurances increasingly consider medical treatment somewhere unfamiliar but affordable.

Whereas the majority of the literature emphasizes rational factors and economic aspects, some studies show that quality of services plays a crucial role, too. Attentive care has become scarce in Northern countries but is a real need for patients. A second emotionally crucial moment of international medical travel is the encounter with the 'other', which complements the unsettledness of ill health.

This project looks beyond mere rational, economic issues and investigates on what it entails for mobile patients to travel abroad for medical treatment.

### Theoretical Approach: Performativity

The project is based on a performative approach that views discursive and material practices as the



### Method: multi-sited approach

Problem-centered interviews with patients and experts  
Participant observation in selected clinics in India  
Visual analysis of hospitals' inner and outer environments  
  
Theoretical sampling  
Analysis: grounded theory coding procedures

central entity constituting social phenomena (Simonsen 2010). Using Ahmed's (2004) performative conceptualization of emotions, the project is interested in how emotions work; e.g. emotions allow for affinities between bodies.

### Research Questions

The project examines the phenomenon of medical mobility both from the point of view of consumer-patients and health care suppliers. A special focus is laid on

- care and hospitality and on
- the competing rationales involved in global health care.

Following research questions will be answered:

- How do suppliers in the Global South perform attentive care? How do they create an environment in which international patients feel welcome and comfortable?
- How do (potential) mobile patients from the Global North imagine medical travel? How do they experience care and the environment? How do they cope with the encounter with the 'other'?
- To what extent and how does traveling for health to the Global South change pre-conceptions of the destination as well as the self, the body and health?

