

Moving beyond Medical Tourism: An Analysis of Intra-Regional Medical Mobility in the Global South

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Abstract : The movement of patients from the Global North to the Global South in pursuit of inexpensive healthcare and touristic experiences dominates the academic discourse on international medical travel (IMT). However, medical travel exists in higher numbers between Global South countries as patients who lack trust in, and feel disenfranchised by, their national healthcare systems seek treatment in nearby countries. Through a review of the existing literature, this paper examines patterns of IMT in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Southern Africa, distinguishing North-South medical tourism from South-South intra-regional medical mobility (IRMM). Evidence from these case studies demonstrates that notions of medical distrust and disenfranchisement, rooted in low-resourced and poor quality healthcare systems, are key drivers of IRMM in the Global South. The movement of patients from lower income to proximate higher income countries not only reveals tensions between patients and their healthcare systems but widens gaps in the quality of healthcare between departing and destination countries. In analyzing these cross-regional similarities, the paper moves beyond the current literature's focus on singular case studies to expose global patterns of South-South IRMM. This presents a shift from the traditional focus on North-South medical tourism, demonstrating how disparities in healthcare systems both influence and are influenced by IRMM.

Keywords : global South, healthcare quality, international medical travel (IMT), intra-regional medical mobility (IRMM), medical disenfranchisement, medical distrust, medical tourism

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