Health Care Tourism Project- Key Element for Portfolio

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**Select a surgical procedure that Americans regularly have carried out in another country**

Obesity is a growing concern in America today and carries with it stigma of being lazy or having lack of a care for one’s self.  For this reason I have chosen weight loss surgeries (WLS), specific to the gastric sleeve, performed in Mexico for the focus of this Key Element Project for Transcultural Patterns of Healthcare Course NUR 305.

**What is your opinion on this form of health tourism?**

Any surgical procedure carries inherent risks no matter in what country surgery is performed.  That being said, I feel that the risks outweigh the benefits of having an invasive weight loss surgical procedure in Mexico.  The surgeons who perform these specialty procedures do not have to board certified and that calls into question, how are they qualified or trained to perform gastric sleeves, lap-bands or the more complex gastric bypass? “To do bariatric surgery in Mexico, any general surgeon is legally able to do it”(Trinity Medical, 2017, p. 7).

**What are the risks that patient might face in having this procedure carried out in another country?**

One risk is that “doctors in this country are often reluctant to take on the patients of overseas surgeons because of liability concerns” (Weiss, 2014, para. 33).  So if a patient has complications trying to find a surgeon to repair or address issues is exceedingly difficult.  Other potential risks are similar to those performed in the U.S. and are excessive bleeding, infection, reactions to anesthesia, leaks in the gastro-intestinal tract, blood clots and death (Mayo Clinic, 2019).  However, there is relatively little regulatory oversight of these clinics and recently a class action lawsuit was filed involving a surgical practice associates in Tijuana due to irrevocable surgical injuries (abc15 News Arizona, 2018).

**What hurdles does the American patient have to overcome to have the procedure carried out in another country?**

Several sites were reviewed, and the requirements are all similar (Tijuana Bariatric Center [TBC], 2019):

* Up to date passport
* Age- 18-65
* Over 100 pounds of ideal weight
* Previous failed weight loss attempts
* Body Mass Index (BMI) of over 40 unless co-morbid conditions are present (ex. high blood pressure, diabetes)
* No addictions to drugs or alcohol
* Committed to lifestyle changes and have realist goals about the outcome
* Review of past medical history (must provide medical records)

Why would someone want to have the procedure carried out in another country? Explain the cost comparisons and list three advantages of carrying out the procedure in another country?

There can be several reasons as to why a person would choose Mexico as a Medical Tourism destination, the most prevalent is the cost.  If a patient passes all the inclusion requirements in the U.S., their insurance deductibles and co-pays may be in the thousands or they lack insurance altogether.  The gastric sleeve is 3x less expensive as compared to America. “In spite of these well-established benefits, less than 1% of candidates undergo surgery due to multiple factors, such as patient and physician perceptions and attitudes, patient-physician interaction, lack of resources, and cost burden”(Westerveld & Yang, 2016, para. 1).

*Figure 1* Price Comparison US vs. Mexico (Bariatric Surgery Source, 2019, Comparison Chart).

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| **Gastric Sleeve Cost**  |
| United States  | $19,539  |
| Canada  | n/a  |
| Mexico  | $5,125  |

Lack of barriers to meet inclusion criteria.  As addressed above medical records are reviewed and some Mexican practices may request to speak with the primary care provider.  Anyone with a medical record who is morbidly obese can create a paper trail and can be approved. Depending on several factors from age to insurance requirements can create multiple barriers to be considered a candidate for WLS.

The quoted costs of the procedure are advertised as all inclusive.  Meaning that pre-operative tests (blood work, x-rays etc.), travel and logistical fees (transportation to/from the hospital), the associated surgical fees and post-operative tests and evaluations are included (Bariatric Surgery Source, 2019). Where as in the U.S. all fees are independently assessed from pre-op visits, nutritional counseling, blood work, behavioral health evaluations, surgeons fees, anesthesiology fees and cost for the hospital stay.

What is the procedure? How would you explain it to someone who was not a nurse?

The WLS chosen for this project is referred to as the Gastric Sleeve.  In layman’s terms the size of the stomach is reduced by up to 80% of the original size.  This means that you will eat less because the size of your stomach is reduced and you reach a level of feeling full because the stomach produces less of the hunger-causing agents (Bariatric Surgery Source, 2019).

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