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INTERNATIONAL MARKETING STRATEGY FOR MEDICAL TOURISM

IN CUENCA

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to God for being my guide, my strength, for give me the presence of my family and everything I needed to develop myself in my studies and as a human being.

To my parents, Carlos and Mercedes, for teaching me humility, perseverance and the joy of a job well done.

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Resumen

La presente investigación planteo el desarrollo de una estrategia de marketing internacional para el turismo médico en Cuenca, Ecuador basándose en el plan piloto de turismo médico en Cuenca que tuvo un enfoque nacional. El proyecto planteado tiene como base fuentes secundarias como libros, artículos, periódicos y documentos oficiales que descansan en la base de datos de la Fundación Municipal Turismo para Cuenca, además se realizaron entrevistas abiertas a los principales involucrados de cada clínica y hospital participante.

Después de conocer el plan nacional, el rol de cada institución participante, la situación del turismo médico actual y ventajas y desventajas existentes se logra concluir que el proyecto tiene grandes oportunidades de éxito si se tiene una adecuada organización, seguimiento y promoción. Finalmente se han planteado ideas claras sobre los medios que deberían utilizarse, el costo y el mensaje.

Abstract

In the following investigation I present the development of an international marketing strategy for medical tourism in Ecuador based on a pilot program of medical tourism in Cuenca, which had a national focus.

The proposed project has as its foundation secondary sources; books, articles, newspapers, and official documents found on the database of the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, we have also conducted open interviews to the key stakeholders of each clinic and hospital involved.

After learning the National plan, the role of each institution involved, the current situation and its advantages and disadvantages, we have concluded that the project has great opportunity of success if it has an adequate organization, follow up, and promotion.

Finally we have planted a clear idea about the medias we must use, the cost, and the message we intend to deliver

Introduction

Tourism is an economic activity that is growing in Ecuador, each year many tourists enter this country with multiple objectives. But in recent years a new concept of tourism emerged, called medical tourism. Since 2007 the city of Cuenca became involved in this new diversified tourism activity in the country.

The objective of this research is convert the current domestic marketing strategy for medical tourism into an international marketing strategy with the objective to attract more tourists with medical purposes to the city of Cuenca.

For that reason the present status of medical tourism in the city was described, status and role of each of the institutions participating, plus the advantages of the promotion of medical tourism in Cuenca and finally devise an International strategy of marketing to promote medical tourism in Cuenca.

The methodology used for the development of this work was secondary research, with all the documents published by the Municipal Tourism Foundation for Cuenca, such as official reports and print publications. Further field research was used, with interviews with those involved in medical tourism plans both the Municipal Foundation for Cuenca Tourism and participating hospitals and clinics.

CHAPTER 1: MEDICAL TOURISM IN CUENCA

1.1. Background

For many people, the term Medical Tourism is a new phenomenon, but history tells us otherwise. We have to recognize that in recent years, medical tourism has gained greater relevance in the world, in Ecuador and especially in our city, Cuenca. This is why it is important to know about the history of medical tourism and understand its evolution.

This phenomenon began thousands of years ago with migration to spas and thermals. Nowadays, the practices based on curative water and thermal spas have been transformed into top-tier medical installations with recognized doctors that include tourism packages. The combination between contemporary medicine and tourism attractions has become a unique attraction for tourism all over the world, particularly for tourists that are looking for an alternative option for medical treatments at less cost.

According to the electronic journal “Medical Tourism”, even though some people think that medical tourism is a new phenomenon, history gives us a different view. For many years, people travelled long distances to find medical treatments, usually to places recognized for their services in medicine and for their low prices. But many years ago this tourism was relevant to the search for the “Gods”.

The first instances of archeological evidence carry us to the ancient Mesopotamians, and particularly the migration to the God of Health situated in TellBrak, where people were looking for a cure for ophthalmologic illness. These temples are situated in what is currently the country of Syria. It is important to mention that in these times, people were motivated mostly by faith and religion. (Medical Tourism, 2008)

In the history of medical tourism, it is relevant to mention the Temples of Dreams situated in old Egypt. According to Edward Swanson approximately 4000 years ago

these healing centers combined medicine and prayers. The belief that illness was caused by spirits was such that doctors sought medicine inspired in prayers to the Gods asking for their help in healing. These Temples were characterized to treat illness based in meditation soaking in baths and sacrifices to the gods. (Swanson, 2005)

In 600 B.C. Greeks and Romans appeared, and in this time was when the first migrations were evident either on foot or by boat to famous spas and meditation temples along the Mediterranean.

The Aclebia temples, dedicated in honor of the Greek god of medicine, were among the first health centers recognized worldwide. Pilgrims spent several nights in the temple, hoping that Asclepius would appear in a dream to suggest the diagnosis or treatment. (Medical Tourism, 2008)

Asclepius, mentioned in the book Homer's Iliad, was recognized as a real doctor who cured using natural remedies, but the temple was also characterized by the offerings to the gods and contact with snakes. People believed that in this temple many diseases were healed, such as blindness. (Swanson, 2005)

The following medical tourism background brings us to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to resorts and spas located in St. Moritz Switzerland. Today these resorts have become the main destination for people of middle and high class of Europe. It is important that in this period people were looking for cures to common diseases such as rheumatism, syphilis, gonorrhea, blindness and paralysis. Many tourists were in search of medicinal waters, curative spas or the benevolence of the gods to cure their various diseases. (Medical Tourism, 2008)

In the United States, Edward Swanson tells us about the Hot Springs located in Arkansas. It is believed that this place had healing water that could heal rheumatism. For nearly 10,000 years, Native Americans met around the sources of the water wanting a cure for their illnesses. Spanish historians called the mineral springs of this area "The Fountain of Youth". In honor of this belief, in 1887 in Hot Springs the first military hospital in the United States was built, and remains to this day in Arkansas. (Swanson, 2005)

Renato Quezada Castro, the author of “The Elements of Tourism”, tells us that it was the Romans who took the best advantage of natural resources and it is from this history that their thermal hot springs have great relevance around the world, but he also tells us that in the 19th century new concepts arose such as the climactic effects of the summer seasons of the mountainous centers of Switzerland.

Similarly at the end of the XIX century, maritime seasons began to get more popular and with them the French Blue Coast, so new concepts of climatic therapies emerged as mud baths, sand baths, sea baths, algae, marine air and many others. (Castro, 2007)

However, it was not until the start of the 90's that medical tourism began to take force around the world and to be an option in developed countries. Principally because of the high costs associated with healthcare in the countries of North America and Europe, many people took into account the advantages they could enjoy with the currency exchange and began to travel to South American and Caribbean countries searching for good medical treatments that are cheaper than in their countries.

The recognition of specific countries for their interventions also strengthened medical tourism of the current day, like the case of aesthetic surgeries recognized in countries like Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia or dental treatments in Costa Rica. Adding to these health themes what is known as relaxation tourism, in which patients search for changes of climate and recuperation of energy in places characterized by the low physical activities. This type of tourism is considered by many a good change from big cities where they can take advantage of the tranquility of small cities with less tension. (Castro, Elementos de Turismo, 2007)

Spas, hot springs, alternative medicine and other attractions began to transform simple travel with themes of operations or more complicated treatments, where post-operation recuperation is included in natural springs, visits to tourist places, lodging, food and additional items. Regarding this, countries that receive visitors for health themes have begun to develop plans to improve their offers of medical tourism.

Every year many tourists come to Ecuador, but it is only in last 5 years a new tourism concept called medical tourism has emerged. In 2011, the Tourism

Foundation of Cuenca implemented an ambitious tourist project the objective of which is to combine the services of health with a tourism package for foreigners. Thanks to the recognition in 2007 by the Panamerican Health Organization as a healthy city, Cuenca demonstrated to the world its “first-rate hospital infrastructure, medical professionals with national and international prestige, its thermal springs and natural spas for relaxation activities, and its cultural tourism attractions”. The project started in 2011 and has achieved signed agreements with hospitals and clinics of the city that initially contributed a total of \$15,000 for its implementation.

Cuenca does not only have conventional medical tourism, but also services of alternative and ancestral medicine. These make Cuenca a potential competitor in the area of medical tourism around the world. The Hospitals in Cuenca are recognized for their efficiency and prestige in healthcare. Cuenca also has natural hot springs that are offered as centers of relaxation. Different travel agencies have put together tourism packages that include medical treatments, tourist visits throughout the province of Azuay and time to relax in the natural hot springs. This makes Cuenca different and helps to construct a competitive marketing strategy.

1.2. Participation of hospitals

Hospitals cannot work alone; MedTravel Ecuador is one of the pages with international recognition that contributes to the promotion of hospitals. On this page Ecuador is spoken of much as a destination for Medical Tourism, some hospitals in Quito are promoted as well as specifically 2 hospitals in Cuenca, Hospital Monte Sinaí and Hospital del Río, even though five clinics and hospitals in Cuenca have been involved directly with the Medical Tourism project. These are:

- ✓ Hospital Santa Inés
- ✓ Monte Sinaí
- ✓ Hospital del Río
- ✓ Latino Clínica
- ✓ Clínica Santa Ana

Together they have supported the project with \$15,000.00, and have produced publicity campaigns in electronic, physical, televised and written mediums. Also, they have participated actively inside the theme of promotion and have opened their

doors of their clinics and hospitals to show potential clients and the public in general the first-rate service and infrastructure that Cuenca offers.

Also, on different web sites list the professional profiles of distinguished doctors of the city, the services they offer to their patients and their costs. Some with the help of Tour Operators have put together tourism packages in which some places of interest in the province of Azuay can be visited.

Dr. Galo Mauricio Solano, plastic, aesthetic and reconstructive surgeon of the Hospital Monte Sinaí created a complete web page (<http://www.drgalomauriciosolano.com>) which details his academic training as a plastic surgeon, his experience, the treatment he offers in his consulting and the option of living Medical Tourism in Cuenca.

The official tourism page of Cuenca (<http://www.cuenca.com.ec>) offers a well-explained space for Medical Tourism that highlights a brief summary of the attractions that the city offers, and reasons why it is convenient to choose Cuenca for medical treatments, cost of lodging and promotional tours with prices included.

A very relevant part of this page is information for tourists about the cost of the treatments, which are the same in the 5 hospitals that signed the previous agreement. Each clinic or hospital has a page on which the history of the clinic, its mission, its vision and its institutional values are explained. Along with a list of the treatments that they offer, that the hospitals work together with the Municipal Tourism Foundation of Cuenca helps greatly with their promotion, given that having government support gives greater security for the visitor.

Within these examples, the clinics are investigated with prior notice and the tourist can get the service they hope for knowing of the prestige of their doctor, his/her rates and the options that he/she offers.

Without the hospitals as the principal basis in this tourism project the objectives of the initiative could not be reached, as they play a relevant role given that thanks to them and their interest, the clinics and hospitals of Cuenca have become first-rate and have obtained international recognition offering to both national and foreign tourists the security of accessing safe treatments.

It is important to give a brief review of each one of the hospitals and clinics that participate in the Medical Tourism plan. In this way we will better know the contribution of each one of these health centers. To this end the official pages of each clinic or hospital have been included.

Hospital del Río



Illustration 1: Hospital del Río

Source: Hospital del Río, 2013

The University Hospital of the River Hospirio S.A. is a university institution that began its operations on May 26th, 2009, offering first-rate medical services with the highest technological and human resources standards that are available in Southern Ecuador. (Hospital del Rio, 2013)

The hospital offers the best medical professionals in:

- Plastic surgery
- Bariatric surgery
- Traumatology
- Geriatrics
- Pediatrics
- Gastroenterology
- Gynecology
- Urology
- Dental Care, among others.

In addition to the above, the hospital offers large commercial areas in which optics, pharmacies, clothing stores, technology stores and restaurants can be found and on which visitors can count as integral services.

The Hospital del Rio concentrates their attention in the areas of critical care, pursuing patient well-being and friendly, high-quality attention. Because of this, the hospital offers the most complete attention in the area of emergency care in the region, which permits the patient to receive attention from an Urgent Care service that works 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. (Hospital del Rio, 2013).

Hospital Monte Sinaí



Illustration 2: Monte Sinaí

Source: Corporación Médica Monte Sinaí, 2013

In the year 1990, a group of medical professionals with great professional and administrative experience planned the creation of a private center capable of offering health services to Cuenca and the Southern region and providing the most advanced technology; but the most important thing for this group of doctors was to give to their country something that its citizens deserved, “quality and efficiency in healthcare”.

The hospital offers the services and technology necessary to assure the success of the procedures and techniques used in the treatment of varied clinical and surgical pathologies.

Additionally, there are 220 doctors' offices destined for the service of external consulting, in which they offer to the city the service of medical specialists with high levels of training, covering all of the basic specialties of medicine. (Corporación Médica Monte Sinaí, 2013)

Services at the Hospital Monte Sinaí:

- Anesthesiology
- Cardiology
- Emergency Medicine
- Hemodialysis Services
- Gastroenterology
- General and Pediatric Hospitalization
- Gynecology
- Obstetrics
- Intensive Care and Critical Care Medicine
- Laparoscopic Surgery
- Morbid Obesity
- Neonatology
- Otolaryngology (Ears, Nose and Throat Medicine)
- Ophthalmology
- Pediatrics
- Plastic Surgery
- Neurology

Clínica Santa Ana



Illustration 3: Clínica Santa Ana

Source: Clínica Santa Ana, 2013

The Clínica Santa Ana is a medical institution of national prestige, with more than 43 years of health service in the Southern part of the country.

Doctors Leoncio Cordero Jaramillo, Vicente Corral Moscoso, Nicanor Corral Moscoso y Alejandro Serrano Galarza, conceived the Project to institute in the city of Cuenca the first private Surgical Medical center, a goal which was realized with the founding of the Clínica Santa Ana in 1963.

The clinic serves the southern community and especially that of Azuay with nearly 100 doctors specializing in all branches of medicine, 50 hospital beds, diagnostic service with the latest technology and constant attention on the part of the nursing and administrative staff.

Latino Clínica

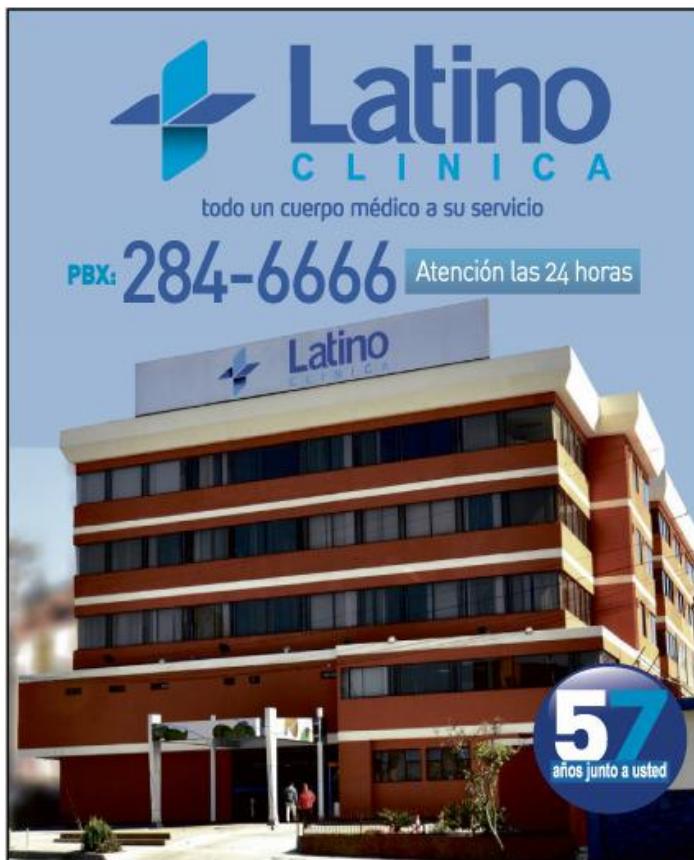


Ilustración 4: Latino Clínica

Fuente: Alcaldía de Cuenca, 2012

Latino Clínica emerged on February 4th, 1957 as the first clinic in Cuenca and in the south of Ecuador, and was founded by Dr. Rubén Astudillo Quintanilla together with a group of specialized doctors outside the country such as Dr. Miguel Molina Calle, Dr. Miguel Tenorio Márquez, and Dr. Jaime Arízaga Bravo, among others.

The “Clínica Santa Clara”, Hospital Latinoamericano and today Latino Clínica are three names with one goal through many years of work. Latino Clínica has always marked important milestones in the history of Cuencano medicine, being the first hospital center to possess all of the instruments and medical equipment in the field of Endoscopy (Laparoscopy, Thoracoscopy, Urology, Traumatology, etc.) In 1991 it was the pioneer in the country to perform minimally invasive surgeries for the removal of the appendix, the gallbladder, the ovaries, and the uterus.

Services:

- Arthroscopy
- Audiometry
- Endoscopic Surgery
- Laparoscopic Surgery
- Pediatric Surgery
- Intensive Care
- Laboratory
- Gynecological Laparoscopy
- Nose and Ear Microsurgery
- Fetal Monitoring
- Neonatology
- Neurosurgery
- Neurology
- Obstetrics
- Oncology
- Chemotherapy
- X-Rays
- Ultrasonography
- Endoscopy of the Colon, Rectum and Anus
- Gynecological Endoscopy
- Hepatology
- Hysteroscopy
- Anatomical Service
- Pathology

(Cuenca Mayor's Office, 2012)

Clínica Santa Inés



Illustration 5: Clínica Santa Inés

Source: EcuaMed, 2011

The Santa Inés Hospital is a medical entity that brings 44 years of service to the healthcare of southern Ecuador, leading under parameters of warmth and quality the region's hospital and medical attention.

Currently, it offers installations with more than 12,000 square meters of work space, 7 floors on which laboratory, pharmacies, cardiology units, imaging centers, 80 hospital rooms, 3 ambulatory operating rooms and 5 specialized operating rooms, a 130-person auditorium, a multiple-use room with capacity for 80 persons, 70 internal parking spaces, a cafeteria and a new tower with more than 40 specialized doctors' offices.

According to the director of the Hospital del Río Luis Alberto Percy, Cuenca offers specialists of the highest scientific level, trained in prestigious medical education centers around the world and recognized by the foremost national and international medical associations.

It is thus that the Hospital makes available to its patients an entire technological, physical and human infrastructure that support their recuperation.

Among the services that the Santa Inés Hospital offers are:

- Lodging and Accommodation
- Imaging and Angiography
- Laboratories with immediate analysis and results
- Specialized operating rooms: pediatric area, neonatal area, coronary specialties area, and tissue and organ transplant area.
- 24-hour emergency with an ambulance equipped with the latest technology.
- Cardiology unit.
- Intensive care units (General, Isolated, Coronary, Pediatric and Neonatal).
- Executive Inspection
- Laparoscopy
- Endoscopy

The Santa Inés Hospital is a pioneer in different medical specialties and high-level surgical procedures.

Currently, it is a leader in open heart surgery in the south of the country with its cardiology unit formed by the best specialists in the country and the only one to perform cerebral aneurysm surgeries via endovascular procedures thanks to its team of first-rate neurosurgeons and neurologists.

In the same way, the Hospital is accredited on behalf of the National Organization of Organ and Tissue Transplant, ONTOT, a dependent entity of the Ministry of Public Health, to perform transplants. Likewise, the Hospital is graded by the country's Social Security office as capable of offering attention of high complexity. (Cuenca Mayor's Office, 2012). Additionally, in 2011 the Santa Inés Hospital was awarded the "Excellence in Health" recognition by the International Health Confederation. (EcuaMed, 2011)

1.3. Role of the Tourism Foundation of Cuenca and the Government

The Mayor's Office of Cuenca together with the Municipal Tourism Foundation of Cuenca have been the two entities that have developed the Medical Tourism plan in Cuenca and are thus in charge of the publicity of this plan. The idea of medical tourism in the city emerged in 2007 when Cuenca began to experience this new boom in tourism thanks to the recognition by the Panamerican Health Organization of Cuenca as a "healthy city".

After receiving logistical and financial support of clinics and hospitals of the city these two entities have been providing information to develop this ambitious project that looks to place Cuenca as a medical tourism destination on national and international levels.

In 2010 a report was presented about the medical tourism situation of Cuenca. With this report the signing of agreements between the Tourism Foundation of Cuenca and five of the most important clinics and hospitals of the city was begun, among the most important aspects that of "the publicity realized through promotional videos of Cuenca Taca and Avianca flights, a project that allowed the exhibition of the tourism destination of Cuenca to an audience of approximately 7,000,000 passengers (Cuenca Mayor's Office, 2011). Within this report the participation in national and international tourism fairs was also highlighted in which the tourism offers of Cuenca are presented to approximately 300 tourism professionals. (The Mayor's Office of Cuenca)

The Major's office published on their official page in 2011 news about the new Medical Tourism project that they were offering. On July 22nd 2011 the official beginning of the project of Medical Tourism began with Paul Granda who was the major of the city the person in charge of developing this project. This project emerged covenanting to mix two important areas important in Cuenca, tourism and medical services. (The Mayor's Office of Cuenca)

The project start with a pilot plan applied in the city for 6 months, this plan consisted developing necessary strategies and skills to develop a new concept of tourism and at the same time diversify the economy of Cuenca and its surroundings.

In that six months the Town Hall and the Foundation of Tourism for Cuenca were willing to develop, promote, and position the Medical tourism Program, providing greater satisfaction to the visitors that arrive to Cuenca for health reasons and at the same time help with the development for activities related to tourism such as lodging, restaurants, receptive local tourism, amongst others.

To carry out this pilot plan, in February 2011 an agreement was signed between the Foundation of Tourism for Cuenca and the following hospitals; Santa Ines, Monte Sinai, Del Rio, Latino Clinic and Clinic Santa Ana. They contributed \$15,000.00 for the development of a promotional campaign. (Town Hall of Cuenca, 2011).

The reports provided by the Town Hall of Cuenca indicate that the private sector of tourism in the city of Cuenca also joined this initiative, creating special packages based on the needs of these types of visitors providing discounts and additional benefits in lodging and complementary touristic services that provide and added value to the project. (Town Hall of Cuenca, 2011).

Moreover, the work report of the Foundation of Tourism for Cuenca for the year 2012 presents a brief summary of the activities that the institution has performed with the aim of promoting medical tourism in the country.

Among the most important points discussed in this report the trade agreement Grupo Vistazo for editing "120,000 copies of a supplement of 44 pages of Medical Tourism, which were distributed nationwide with the magazine Hogar on April 12th and with the magazine Vistazo on April 19th Glance "(Municipal Foundation of Tourism for Cuenca , 2013)

Following the report we can emphasize that it is the Foundation of Tourism for Cuenca that has been leading all the promotion and advertising of medical tourism, with campaigns on television, radio and print media. Within these campaigns they have included managers of clinics and hospitals in the city who collaborate with all the information available doctors, hospital infrastructure, capacity and prices. This second edition of publicity helped provide awareness nationwide about the innovative offer Cuenca has for the country.

The third edition of publicity helped the Foundation to find national Tour Operators mainly from Quito interested in being part of the project and put together tour packages focusing on medical tourism offering the tourist accommodation, medical treatment, transportation, recovery in Hot Springs, food among other components. (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2013)

On the other hand the Government of Ecuador has also developed various projects to promote tourism which have been in charge of the Ministry of Tourism, they are:

- ✓ PLANDETUR 2020 (Strategic Plan for development of Sustainable Tourism for Ecuador) - 2007
- ✓ PIMTE 2014 (Strategic Plan for Touristic Marketing of Ecuador) – 2009

It can be said that the main role regarding the promotion and development of medical tourism plans is led by the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca who work together with the Town Hall of Cuenca.

The Ministry of Tourism is responsible for presenting the current state of tourism in general, and to develop marketing plans that help foster the different kinds of tourism that the country has.

Furthermore, the foundation seeks to serve the general public with their official website: (<http://www.cuenca.com.ec/>) where you can find treatment costs for lodging, and tour costs among other information relevant to the tourist who is planning to visit Cuenca to take advantage of the hospital services.

CHAPTER 2

Advantages and disadvantages of promoting medical tourism in Cuenca

Medical tourism like any other new phenomenon for a country or in this specific case the city of Cuenca, brings advantages and disadvantages. This chapter will discuss some of the social, economic, and technological advantages and disadvantages that have been experienced or may be experienced with the promotion of Medical Tourism in Cuenca.

This analysis will be based on some of the results that have been obtained from 2011 until the current date; this information was obtained from the Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca and different medical centers in the city involved in the project, given that one of the main problems that the pilot plan presented for development of medical tourism in Cuenca, is the absence of a mechanism for statistical control between clinics, hospitals and the foundation. Most of information obtained for this chapter will be based on interviews, with the project coordinator of the Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca (Andres Ochoa) and the representatives of clinics and hospitals.

2.1 Social Advantages

Within the social advantages of promoting medical tourism, it can be found as the first and main point the role model that it accounted for other cities of the country. Andres Ochoa, project coordinator for the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, in his interview said that without doubt one of the first social benefits that medical tourism in Cuenca represented since 2011 is the model for other cities such as Quito and Guayaquil.

ECUAMED a Canadian company, managed to gather the country's most powerful attractions, creating attractive packages focused on the potential needs in health that Canadians have. This company began with an agreement with the Foundation and

managed to reach agreements with nationally recognized hospitals like Eugenio Espejo in Quito.

Within these advantages we can also mention the accreditations developed by participating clinics within this project such as:

- ✓ Accreditation by the National Transplant Organization of organs and tissues, ONTOT, under the Ministry of Public Health.
- ✓ Social Security attention of high complexity.
- ✓ Declaration of the city of Cuenca as "Health City" by the Pan-American Organization of Health
- ✓ ISO 9001

In addition, for the citizens of Cuenca there has been the creation of new places of recreation that will be described and explained such as spas, restaurants, health centers etc. These places were promoted in pamphlets, flyers, television and radio within the marketing campaign, launched in January 2011 as part of the pilot plan for Medical Tourism.

Restaurants

All cities have a special street and "Calle Larga" in Cuenca located in the historical center is one of the busiest. Locals and foreigners take advantage of the beautiful architectural, gastronomic, and multiple charms offered by this street. Among the most prominent examples is the restaurant "El Jardín" which has three decades of experience. "Todos Santos" is also a restaurant full of history that is in the religious complex of the Oblate Sisters. The entrance to this restaurant is a very pleasant experience where the halls tell the story of the colonial convent. Other great examples are restaurant La Parola, Wunderbar, La Esquina among others. (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

Spas

Just twenty minutes from downtown is the parish of "Baños", where we can witness tranquility and enchanting landscape, which undoubtedly captivate the visitor. According to a pamphlet distributed nationally by the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca one of the main attractions of Baños is the hot springs of volcanic

origin. For decades this site has been recognized for its healing properties. And one of the pioneers is the “Hosteria Duran”, that started its duties with one private pool more than 80 years ago; today it has grown to 4 thermal pools, six Turkish natural steam baths, four private jet baths, 34 rooms and several additional services.

A relatively new complex, the creation of which was about four years ago with a new concept of spas, is “Piedra de Agua”. The main objective is to provide health, recreation and relaxation. Among the attractions are volcanic mud pools with healing properties for the skin. Facilities include thermal pools, underground pools, Turkish pools, massages in temperate caves, but in addition to the baths, in Baños we can also recharge energies while enjoying tours in the midst of nature. An option to enjoy this experience to the fullest is with the help of the experienced “Hosteria Caballo Campana”. (Municipal Foundation of Tourism for Cuenca, 2011)

Health and Recreation Centers

The benefits of sports and exercise are many. For example, it helps prevent cardiovascular diseases, improves concentration, fights depression and anxiety. Thanks to its natural charms, Cuenca is an ideal city for exercise, and its inhabitants know it perfectly. From the early hours of the morning it is common to see dozens of people carrying out activities such as walking, aerobics, jogging or running.

The riverbanks are the busiest, especially the “Yanuncay” and “Tomebamba” rivers. That is why the town in the last two years has implemented a system of the most popular exercise machines in those places as a way to encourage exercise by people of all ages, strengthening the title of which the city has been known since 2007 as “healthy city”. (Municipal Foundation for Tourism for Cuenca, 2011)

Moreover, for foreigners it is increasingly more interesting to know and learn more about the health system in Ecuador. The Center for Inter-American Studies (CEDEI) after learning about the demand for health professionals to know the reality and role of medicine in Ecuador has created different offers for the international market. The following table shows the number of programs and students each program has come with to Cuenca to learn more about the health system in Ecuador, each program includes visits to the main centers of public and private health where it includes two

of the hospitals involved in the project for Medical Tourism, Hospital del Rio and Santa Ines Hospital.

MEDICAL PROGRAMS CEDEI FOUNDATION 2013-2014		
Year	University	Number of Students
2013	California State University, Stanislaus	12
2013	Salisbury	9
2013	St Ambrose	23
2013	Estudiantes Individuales	2
2014	California State University, Stanislaus	13
2014	Neuman	11
2014	Individuals	3
TOTAL		73

Source: (Center for Inter-American Studies CEDEI, 2014)

This influence of students from different medical branches to the city is not only a social but also an economic advantage. Social from the point of view that Cuenca is leaving a mark on tourists and recognition for good hospital management, managing to attract the attention of more universities and students who seek to know and learn more about health in developing countries. But also an economic advantage because these groups tend to remain in the city for at least a month which provides economical income to shops, restaurants, transportation, etc.

2.2 Economical Advantages

Certainly the price factor plays an important role when choosing a service, in this sense Cuenca has a considerable competitive advantage as the price of different medical treatments compared nationally with the cities of Quito and Guayaquil are lower and on an international level they are extremely low compared to health care in countries of North America and Europe. (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

According to the Foundation of Tourism for Cuenca, to determine the price of the various travel services to provide, it is important to consider the average daily spending by domestic tourists in 2011 (the year in which the project was developed) was USD \$ 30.00 and is composed as follows: 35% for accommodation, 25% and 40% for general shopping.

It should be noted that medical tourism has a greater capacity of expenses so it will contribute to increasing the average daily spending in the destination. (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011) That is, became medical tourism involves not only medical expenses in patients or tourists but also expenses for lodging, food, recreation and more. Thus not only the health segment would benefit, medical tourism could be considered a diversifying income activity.

2.3 Technological Advantages

The more consumption and international demand a product has, the greater the effort to develop the necessary technology to provide the best services. And in this Cuenca has not been left behind since in terms of technology in medical equipment investments have been substantial in recent years.

That is why some of the clinics and hospitals participating in this project are characterized by their medical equipment and interventions in the Austral region. An example is the St. Ines Hospital that is a leader in open heart surgery and the only one in the region that has the equipment for surgery of cerebral aneurysms by endovascular procedure.

Another example is Clinica Latino, which among its strengths counts on the top tomography scanners of the market to ensure images of high resolution, 3D reconstructions. They also employ that regarding facial aesthetics they have an ablative fractional CO₂ laser SMARTXIDE DOT, unique in the south. This laser is effective against wrinkles, aging and other skin imperfections, without unwanted side effects and with a drastic reduction in recovery time. (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca 2011)

2.4 Social Disadvantages

Certainly as a city, there are still some issues that need to be strengthened to be more receptive to foreign patients. While it is true and there is no communication problems with patients from neighboring countries who speak Spanish, when communicating with patients from North America and Europe, the lack of bilingual or trilingual staff is evident.

Most clinics and hospitals do not have staff who speak other languages fluently, it is not enough that the doctor speaks another language which mostly is always English, but what happens when nurses, cleaners, receptionists, etc. are not able to make themselves understood with a foreign patient? This raises a level of uncertainty that discourages the patient, if the patient is not sure what the doctor or other hospital staff explains, the patient may reconsider having any medical procedure done.

After a long field research in different hospitals, it can be verified that there are very few doctors who communicate in other languages and the predominant language is English. Nurses hardly speak another language and the few who do have a basic level which is not enough to communicate well with a patient.

However I found that there are people who provide medical translators, as in the case of Liza Santelli a Cuencana which worked in a hospital in the United States for more than 20 years. She returned to the city as a retreat, but after visiting a clinic in Cuenca, she found a job opportunity as a translator. She has no agreement with any clinic or hospital and works independently. She promotes her services through web pages for foreigners like Gringo Tree. She is available every day and every hour of translation she charges \$ 15.00. She is well known by doctors mainly in Hospital del Rio and St. Ines Hospital.

2.5 Economical Disadvantages

The public health system, such as health centers and the Vicente Corral Moscoso Hospital is an example of the economic disadvantages faced in the city of Cuenca. When visiting the Vicente Corral Moscoso Hospital, which is not within the medical tourism plan, being a public hospital it has no cost to its users, the director of research Dr. Marco Palacios commented that the number foreigners who are benefiting from the public health system in Cuenca is growing. This represents a clear concern about the economic sustainability of the Hospital.

For Dr. Marco Palacios it is certainly unfortunate that people with sufficient economic capacity to contract private services have access to these benefits. He also comments that the hospital has patients from neighboring countries like Peru who actually come to Cuenca for help because their economic condition is not the best.

The director mentions his concern about the lack of regulation for foreigners and the health system and states that he does not know how long the Regional Hospital of the city of Cuenca can cover the costs of such a large influx of patients. During a short tour to learn about this situation we could account for 18 patients from countries in North America and Europe.

Surely this shows a serious economic disadvantage for the medical tourism project, since it was found that public hospitals, where medicine is free, could be an internal competition for those private hospitals and clinics that initially prompted the idea of medical tourism.

2.6 Technological Disadvantages

Lack of technology and logistics is one of the strongest disadvantages faced in the city of Cuenca. For Dr. Luis Alberto Percy, medical director of the Hospital del Rio, the lack of an international airport which allows tourists to get a direct flight to Cuenca from their countries of origin is the main obstacle. When the patient begins to look for options in other countries they do not only analyze health standards, but they also look for the ease of mobility. "How can we compete with Quito or Guayaquil? They also have a medical tourism projects where they can receive international flights, much less compete with countries like Costa Rica "(Percy, 2014).

The Hospital del Rio is the only hospital in the Medical Tourism Plan for Cuenca, who tried to keep track of patients coming to their facilities through an advertising plan but after receiving only 3 patients in 2012 decided to stop carrying this registration. That is why there is no data on the flow of patients who came to the city based on this plan.

A significant disadvantage that Dr. Percy said in his interview is the lack of specialized centers in the patient's recovery, "we have beautiful houses in the city, but none with equipment or personnel to attend a patient" (Percy, 2014). All this scares the international patient. That may be attracted by the low prices, specialized staff, international standards, the latest equipment, but any additional medical services, certainly makes tourists think twice before deciding to come to Cuenca.

CHAPTER 3

Marketing strategy for the international promotion of medical tourism in Cuenca

Having made a brief explanation of the current situation of medical tourism in Cuenca and a description of current advantages and disadvantages of the project of medical tourism, I can begin to develop a proposal for international marketing strategy to promote medical tourism in Cuenca.

3.1 Project description of medical tourism in Cuenca

The medical tourism pilot plan was implemented in the city of Cuenca in 2011; however since 2007 Cuenca began to experience an increase in inbound tourism of people seeking conventional medical treatments as an alternative location. The Medical Tourism Plan is an initiative of the Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, who with a group of five prestigious medical centers in the city decided to invest in this new tourism proposal.

As starting points the plan sought a development of domestic tourism, and seeks for people in Ecuador to consider the medical centers of the city of Cuenca as their first choice for their medical issues, but in the course of just two and a half years the city began to receive more foreigners from all over the world as patients. The combination of natural and conventional medicine is a unique attraction, together with affordable costs and the prestige of health professionals have made Cuenca a recommended destination for global health.

According to the information kept by The Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca in its databases Creation and Implementation of the Pilot Program Medical Tourism in the City of Cuenca "Project - Ecuador" is to develop strategies and provide the necessary tools for development of medical tourism as a diversifying tourism activity and revitalizing the economy of the destiny of Cuenca and its surroundings. (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

For this foundation the main goal of the project was to diversify tourism in Cuenca through the creation and promotion of tourism products that have a mix of the strengths of health professionals and natural and cultural attractions of the city. For the initial stage of this project they were given 6 months to develop, promote and position the medical tourism program.

As part of the strategies to promote new tourism in Cuenca in 2012, a familiarization trip for the press was carried out with the purpose of promoting Cuenca nationwide as a destination for health. This event was held from March 28th to March 31st 2012 with 31 journalists from different media nationwide. The participating journals were:

- ✓ Diario El Universo
- ✓ Revista Caras
- ✓ Canal Uno
- ✓ Diario El Correo
- ✓ TC Televisión
- ✓ Revista Turismo y Comercio

Reporters interviewed the managers of hospitals and spas and inspected the highlights of the infrastructure of each of these places, they complemented their visits to touristic sites in the city, as well as the nature trail made in the Aguarongo forest. The journalists' reviews were all positive and they applauded at the initiative of the Foundation emphasizing on the fact that this is something completely new in the country. They were also impressed with the excellent infrastructure in the city for health, relaxation and beauty. The reports were published in the course of the following months in the following media:

- ✓ Canal Uno, 7 minute report
- ✓ "Divinas" April 2012;
- ✓ El Universo, 2 page report "Familia" magazine May 20th 2012;
- ✓ Revista Transport, 2 page report in edition May 2012;
- ✓ Revista Caras, 1 page report July 2012

The value benefits obtained in this press trip is approximately as follows:

- ✓ Revista Familia de El Universo: \$ 7.638 USD
- ✓ Revista Transport: \$ 3.000 USD
- ✓ Canal Uno: \$ 4.200 USD

- ✓ Revista Caras: \$ 1.680 USD
- ✓ TOTAL: \$ 16.518 USD

For the city of Cuenca this is an innovative project that seeks to diversify the transverse axes of economic development. The supply of these products is initially focused on the domestic market and specifically the source market of Azuay, Guayas, El Oro, Loja and the South East.

It is important to emphasize that this plan is aligned with the National Plan for Good Living, the PLANDETUR 2020, which was updated in January 2014, and the Comprehensive Plan for Tourism Marketing; based on the programs and projects of strategic foundation for sustainable tourism in Ecuador.

Strategy description

Within the plan developed by the Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca and after analyzing the supply and demand that the city has, one can conclude that the "proposed strategy is to structure a quality tourism product whose main component is the provision of health services complemented by activities related with tourism like Hydrotherapy, culture and nature. "(Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

To develop this strategy a group of private clinics and hospitals sought through a public offering in which the following were selected Sta. Ines Hospital, Hospital del Río, Mount Sinai Hospital, Santa Ana Clinic and Latino Clinic, who are contributing financially to the promotion and realization of this project.

It is noteworthy to mention that the touristic sector of the city has also collaborated with this initiative by creating special packages to meet the needs of these type of visitors and providing discounts and additional benefits in accommodation and tourist services that give added value to the project. (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

Thus, according to the summary of the health project we can define three aspects that are part of the strategy:

- a) Implementation of new tourism products

- b) Promotional Campaign.
- c) Training participants in the project centers.

a) Implementation of new tourism products

Medical tourism is a new form of tourism where medical services such as surgery, checkups, and rehabilitation, among others are attractions that bring services to housing, transportation, beauty treatments, recovery and nutrition. The Foundation of Tourism for Cuenca said that while it is true that the destination Cuenca is known for its culture and nature, its touristic offer goes further and offers visitors who demand health services, additional recreation exploiting its natural attractions such as for the thermal waters of the parish Baños (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

It should be clear that this is a new potential for the touristic demand that Cuenca has had over the last six years since gaining international recognition both as a destination and health city. However, sustainable growth of this new product depends on the quality services provided by both the health sector (Hospitals, Doctors, Nurses), as well as the tourism sector (hotels, transportation, recreational tourism, handicrafts).

According to the pilot plan developed by the Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, during the pilot phase of the program the first offers would be packages to consolidated weekends or holidays, which consist of:

- ✓ Lodging 3 days / 2 nights
- ✓ Medical Checkups
- ✓ City Tour
- ✓ Relaxation Therapy in hot springs, spas Baños (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

In the following charts we can see more detailed packages that were offered in 2011 as part of the Medical Tourism plan in Cuenca:

MALE ABOVE 35 YEARS OF AGE	
Laboratory:	Values
RBC, Hemoglobin, Hematocrit, Leukocytes, SCH CBC, Platelets	\$ 10,00
Prothrombin T2	\$ 5,00
Ac. Helicobacter Pylori	\$ 14,00
Glucose	\$ 2,00
Creatinine	\$ 2,00
Uric Acid	\$ 2,00
Cholesterol	\$ 2,00
HDL Cholesterol	\$ 2,00
LDL Cholesterol	\$ 2,00
Triglycerides	\$ 2,00
GTO	\$ 2,50
GTP	\$ 2,50
Alkaline Phosphatase	\$ 2,50
A.C Embryonic	\$ 17,00
A.F. Protein	\$ 17,00
PSA test	\$ 15,00
Urine (physical, chemical and sediment)	\$ 3,00
Feces (parasitology)	\$ 2,50
X Rays:	
Rx. St. Thoracic	\$ 25,00
Superior Abdomen Ultrasound	\$ 28,00
Other:	
Initial and closing Clinical Evaluation	\$ 20,00
Spirometry	\$ 35,00
Electrocardiogram	\$ 25,00
Nutritional Assessment	\$ 15,00
Urological Assessment	\$ 20,00
Stress Test	\$ 70,00
Audiometry	\$ 15,00
Audiometry	\$ 15,00

Source: (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

FEMALE ABOVE 35 YEARS OF AGE	
Laboratory:	Valores
RBC, Hemoglobin, Hematocrit, Leukocytes, SCH CBC, Platelets	\$ 10,00
Prothrombin T2	\$ 5,00
Ac. Helicobacter Pylori	\$ 14,00
Urea	\$ 2,00
Glucose	\$ 2,00
Creatinine	\$ 2,00
Uric Acid	\$ 2,00
Cholesterol	\$ 2,00
HDL Cholesterol	\$ 2,00
LDL Cholesterol	\$ 2,00
Triglycerides	\$ 2,00
GTO	\$ 2,50
GTP	\$ 2,50
Alkaline Phosphatase	\$ 2,50
FT3	\$ 10,00
FT4	\$ 10,00
TSH	\$ 10,00
Urine (physical, chemical and sediment)	\$ 3,00
Feces (parasitology)	\$ 2,50
X Rays:	
Rx. St. Thoracic	\$ 25,00
Mammography	\$ 40,00
Other:	
Initial and closing Clinical Evaluation	\$ 20,00
Spirometry	\$ 35,00
Electrocardiogram	\$ 25,00
Nutritional Assessment	\$ 15,00
Gynecological Assessment	\$ 20,00
Stress Test	\$ 70,00
Audiometry	\$ 15,00

Source: (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

MEDICAL CHECKUP MAN OR FEMALE	
Medical Checkup Executive B	
Laboratory:	Values
Blood count	\$ 10,00
Cholesterol	\$ 2,00
Triglycerides	\$ 2,00
Cholesterol LDL	\$ 2,00
Cholesterol HDL	\$ 2,00
Glucose	\$ 2,00
Physical , Chemical and Urine Sediment	\$ 3,00
VDRL	\$ 3,00
Rays X:	
Rx. St. of Chest	\$ 25,00
Radiografy Ap- Lat	\$ 32,00
Others:	
Electroencephalogram	\$ 60,00
Electrocardiogram	\$ 25,00
Audiometry	\$ 15,00
Ophthalmological Rating	\$ 15,00

Source: (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

MEDICAL CHECKUP MAN OR FEMALE	
Medical Checkup Executive C	
Laboratory:	Valores
Blood count	\$ 10,00
Cholesterol	\$ 2,00
Triglycerides	\$ 2,00
Cholesterol LDL	\$ 2,00
Cholesterol HDL	\$ 2,00
Glucose	\$ 2,00
Physical , Chemical and Urine Sediment	\$ 3,00
VDRL	\$ 3,00
Rays X:	
Rx. St. of Chest	\$ 25,00
Otros:	
Audiometry	\$ 15,00

Source: (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

Preferential Rates
Accommodation
Hotel Santa Lucía SGL: \$70,00 DBL: \$90,00 TPL: \$125,00 Include: Desayuno Buffet, welcome drink Taxes no included. Address: Antonio Borrero 8-44 y Sucre Phone: (5937)2828000 pecheverria@santaluciahotel.com Web Page: www.santaluciahotel.com
Hotel Carvallo SGL: \$65,00 DBL: \$70,00 TPL: \$95,00 Include: Buffet Breakfast Taxes no included. Address: Gran Colombia 952 entre Padre Aguirre y Benigno Malo Phone: (5937) 283 2063 reservas@hotelcarvallo.com.ec Web Page: www.hotelcarvallo.com
Hotel Oro Verde SGL: \$65,00 DBL: \$73,00 Include: Transfer in/out Taxes no included. Address: Av. Ordóñez Lazo S/N Phone: (5937) 409 0000 ventas.cue@oroverdehotels.com Web Page: www.oroverdehotels.com
Hotel Crespo SGL: \$51,00 DBL: \$65,00 Taxes no included. Address: Calle Larga 7-93 Phone: (5937) 284 2571 reservacioneshotelcrespo@yahoo.es Web Page: www.hotelcrespo.com
Hotel Casa del Águila SGL: \$47,00 DBL: \$67,00 TPL: \$93,00 Include: Americano Breakfast Taxes no included. Address: Mariscal Sucre 13-56 entre Juan Montalvo y Estévez de Toral Phone: (5937) 2849580/2836498 reservas@hotelcasadelaguila.com Web Page:www.hotelcasadelaguila.com
Hotel San Juan SGL: \$40,00 DBL: \$40,00 TPL: \$80,00 Include: Continental breakfast, Transfer In/Out Taxes no included. Address: General Torres 9-59 y Gran Colombia Phone:(5937)2840870 info@sanjuanhotel.ec Web Page: www.sanjuanhotel.ec
Hotel Victoria SGL: \$42,97 DBL: \$60,28 TPL: \$74,56 Include: Breakfast Taxes no included. Address: Calle Larga 6-93 y Borrero Phone: (5937) 2827401 - 2832340 gstaana@etapanet.net Web Page: www.grupo-santaana.net

Source: (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

OPTION 1:**CUENCA, ALL A HEALTH WORLD**

(Complete day)

- Pick up in hotel.
- City Tour / Shopping a complete morning: Visit to : San Sebastián, Museo de Arte Moderno, Museo de las Conceptas, Museo del Sombrero, Catedral vieja, Catedral Nueva, Mirador de Turi y Centros Artesanales, a good opportunity to shopping.
- Traditional Cuencano Lunch.
- Afternoon of relax in “Piedra de Agua Spa”.

PROGRAM INCLUDE:

- Turistic Transport
- Tour guide – and driver bilingual
- Lunch
- Access to the “Hostería”: exclusive steam baths , external circular baths , underground thermal pools, volcanic mud pools , exclusive terrace rest, bathroom drawer caves , limestone cave music therapy

PRICE PER PERSON: \$99,00+12% OF TAXES

Source: (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

OPTION 2:**CUENCA, ALL A HEALTH WORLD**

(Half Day)

- City Tour / Shopping (3 hours): Tour of the most representative elements of the Historic Center: churches, museums, galleries, parks, markets and craft centers so visitors can buy a world of souvenirs.
- Two hours of relax in “Piedra de Agua Spa”.
- Afternoon of relax in “Piedra de Agua Spa”.

PROGRAM INCLUDE:

- Turistic Transport
- Tour guide – and driver bilingual
- Lunch
- Access to the “Hostería”: exclusive steam baths , external circular baths , underground thermal pools, volcanic mud pools , exclusive terrace rest, bathroom drawer caves , limestone cave music therapy.

PRICE PERSON

USD \$75,00+12% OF TAXES

Source: (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

**OPCION 3:
POR LA RUTA DE LAS ARTESANIAS**

(Complete Day)

Gualaceo, Chordeleg y Sígsig which are the most representative cantons where you can have an experience full of food and a variety of opportunities to acquire the most representative of Azuay culture.

PROGRAM INCLUDE:

- Turistic Transport
- Tour guide – and driver bilingual
- Lunch

PRICE PER PERSON: \$75,00+12% For taxes

Source: (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

b) Promotional Campaign

The promotion strategies of this project were mainly geared towards the domestic market, specifically the provinces of Guayas, El Oro, Loja and all South East provinces and Cuenca's natural markets; with hope that as the program matures there can be a focus on an international promotion strategy.

The activities included:

- *"Permanent advertising and information campaign: Through the mainstream media of target markets, but not only promotional advertising but also informative advertising about the health offering of the city of Cuenca.*
- *Promotional strategies with tour operators as well as the city of Cuenca for selling tour packages.*
- *Familiarization trips: an agenda will be prepared to invite leading travel agents and health related companies (ex. insurance companies) of the target markets in order to raise awareness of the new touristic offering.*
- *Participation in fairs and tourism events in which you can offer and make contacts for the sale of new products."* (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

c) Training

To the correct operation of this project, was necessary a training program to facilitate tools for professionalism both the health sector and the private tourism sector and provide efficient services to tourists. (Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, 2011)

In conclusion we can say that the pilot plan to implement medical tourism in the city of Cuenca consisted of promotion through various national media of more than \$ 16,000, according to the official documents provided by the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca and had a main focus on a national market, but it was considered that depending on the progress the same project could be designed for an international market, so the plan in conjunction with tour agencies and participating hospitals tour packages was developed for the patient or tourist who would like to access these services.

It was also an idea to implement this pilot scheme for six months until July 2011 and then to analyze the results and develop the final plan, however Andres Ochoa told us that since 2011 this plan was on standby after learning about the various shortcomings such as lack of control and project monitoring and analyzing the different obstacles legal feasibility, lack of training and lack of promotion to boost medical tourism internationally.

After visiting the involved hospitals and the project coordinator in The Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, we can conclude the following:

- ✓ The pilot plan with a purpose to promote medical tourism for the city of Cuenca initiated in the year 2011 with a focus on the national market, mainly the southern region of the country.
- ✓ Unfortunately after 6 months of evaluation the project was not carried out and it hasn't reached the international market as planned.
- ✓ A program did not exist in the medical centers involved in the project to register the number of patients who applied through this plan.
- ✓ After its promotion during the year 2011 the program did not receive major importance to continue.

- ✓ For the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca the fact that it is considered a public institution and of the state, began to fear reprisals about this project so they decided to stay out. Based on international law, as a public institution they could not risk being part of an international lawsuit for medical malpractice for example. Only once the project was launched did they realize the lack of regulations that the program had regarding the responsibility of the clinics as it was not a normal product of tourism, but one in which the life and health of the tourist was directly related.
- ✓ A major international accreditation that countries like Colombia and Costa Rica have which lead medical tourism is provided by the Joint Commission. In 2011 none of the participating centers was in the process of obtaining one of its international certificates, such certificates are important because for an international patient in search of the best choice for treatment and who has no knowledge of the health centers in other countries the only thing that allows you to make a safer decision is the international recognition that hospitals may have, such as certifications and international awards and certainly the Joint Commission certifications are the most prominent in the medical field.
- ✓ The different health centers involved have not proposed a training plan for staff to care for patients worldwide.

3.2 Preparation of the proposed marketing for international medical tourism

After learning about the current situation of medical tourism in the city of Cuenca and after visiting the main centers involved which provided the discovery of the influx of foreign patients who arrive on a daily basis to medical centers from neighboring countries like Peru and Colombia, or more distant countries from North America and Europe, it was considered necessary to develop a proposal for international marketing, to provide the patients and health centers involved the greatest benefits.

To develop a proposed international marketing plan and because it has been three years since the pilot plan was launched, the following proposal will be based on the book "Marketing" by Philip Kotler and will include the following:

- ✓ Current marketing situation
- ✓ Market Description

- ✓ Evaluation of product
- ✓ Evaluation of competition
- ✓ Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.
- ✓ Objectives (Kotler, 2012)
- ✓ Marketing Strategy
- ✓ Programs for Action

Current Marketing Situation

Since 2011 the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca together with five local hospitals and clinics of the city launched on the public market the medical tourism pilot plan. This plan had a time limit of up to six month until June 2011 to then finally launch the final plan, however even though the campaign had achievable and well proposed goals it never had control mechanism and monitoring to determine to what extent the advertising campaigns had effect.

After June 2011, the pilot had no modification or adjustment, the foundation put the project on hold and towards the end of 2013 the coordinator that prompted this major project (Andres Ochoa) ended his job working at the Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, there have been various disadvantages to both the hospitals and for the municipal entity to develop the plan of medical tourism.

Drawbacks such as lack of international recognition of hospitals, hospitals multilingual training, logistics in transportation and above all the responsibility that involves providing health services backed by a government organization have slowed both national and international development of medical tourism in Cuenca.

However developing countries such as Costa Rica have set the example of how to begin diversifying international tourism with medical tourism plans. Thanks to the fact that Cuenca has increasing tourism for different reasons like the declaration in 2007 as a healthy city, staying in the top destinations for retirees, the development of medicine and hospital infrastructure, among others, a plan for medical tourism is definitely a project that deserves more attention from the city due to the potential it has to develop not only for a national approach as it was intended, but a plan with an international focus and perspective.

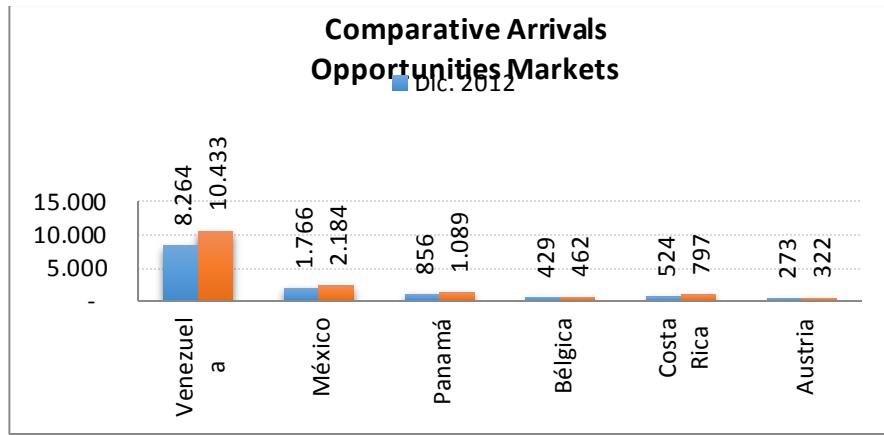
Market Description

The new market which is proposed to enter with an international tourism plan comprises several countries, according to consultations with managers of hospitals and municipalities nearby as is the case of Peru and Colombia would be the markets in South America we could focus for two important reasons, the first being the two countries share borders with Ecuador and the number of migrants from these countries are increasing.

Also the second largest number of tourists in Ecuador come from The United States which makes this a very important market without leaving behind the market from Venezuela, which is one of the most powerful markets of opportunity right now, as indicated in the following graphs.



Source: OPTUR, 2013



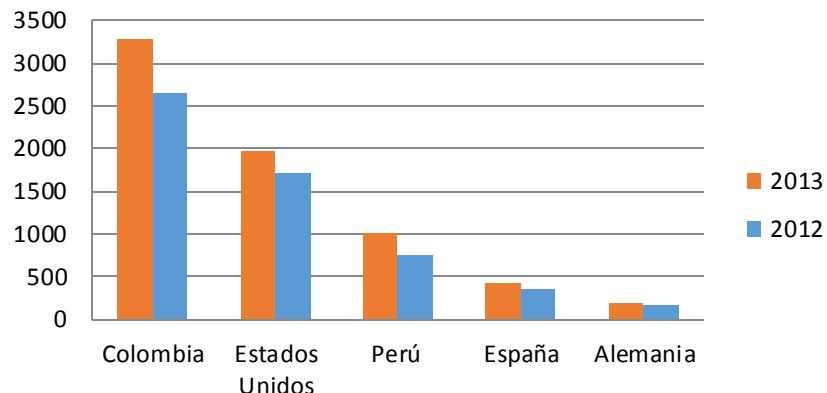
Source: OPTUR, 2013

FOREIGN ARRIVALS BY COUNTRY OF NATIONALITY				
	COUNTRY	JAN-14	FEB-14	% PART.
1	COLOMBIA	54.467	26.770	29,3
2	UNITED STATES	19.262	19.982	14,2
3	PERU	15.570	19.154	12,5
4	ARGENTINA	11.189	6.365	6,3
5	VENEZUELA	6.464	7.033	4,9
6	CHILE	4.964	7.076	4,3
7	SPAIN	5.402	5.158	3,8
8	CANADA	3.586	3.219	2,5
9	GERMANY	2.291	3.457	2,1
10	MEXICO	2.089	1.932	1,5
11	GREAT BRITAIN	2.155	1.828	1,4
12	BRAZIL	2.156	1.656	1,4
13	CUBA	2.008	1.536	1,3
14	FRANCE	1.642	1.531	1,1
15	HAITI	1.542	1.478	1,1
	TOTAL	152.576	124.584	100,0

Source: National Directorate of Immigration (Ministry of Tourism, 2014)

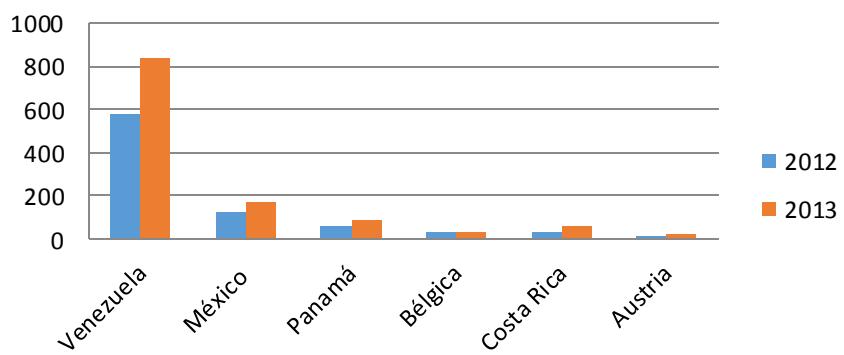
It is noteworthy to mention that according to data provided by multiple officers of the Ministry of Tourism, in 2012 it was concluded that 7% of all tourists who entered Ecuador visited the city of Cuenca while in 2013 the figure was approximately 8%. As described in above tables would be as follows if we only refer to Cuenca.

Comparative Arrival - Main Markets



Personal Source

Comparativo Arribos Mercados de Oportunidad



Personal Source

FOREIGN ARRIVALS BY COUNTRY OF NATIONALITY			
	COUNTRY	feb-14	Cuenca-9%
1	COLOMBIA	26.770	2409
2	UNITED STATES	19.982	1798
3	PERU	19.154	1724
4	ARGENTINA	6.365	573
5	VENEZUELA	7.033	633
6	CHILE	7.076	637
7	SPAIN	5.158	464
8	CANADA	3.219	290
9	GERMANY	3.457	311
10	MEXICO	1.932	174
11	GREAT BRITAIN	1.828	165
12	BRAZIL	1.656	149
13	CUBA	1.536	138
14	FRANCE	1.531	138
15	HAITI	1.478	133
	TOTAL	124.584	9736

Personal Source

It can be concluded that the target market for the proposed Medical Tourism Cuenca, are in general all foreigners visiting the city which make use of the medical system, considering that the main visitors enter from Colombia, United States, Peru, Spain and Germany, campaigns and the plan should focus on these markets, not forgetting the opportunity markets as is the case with Venezuela and Mexico.

The purpose is that tourists are aware of the medical plan in Cuenca before they choose it as a typical tourist destination and with this they can make a decision to have their interventions, treatments or consultations in the city. On the other hand we also cannot neglect those tourists who come to Cuenca for the typical touristic services and should try to draw the attention of these tourists, to learn about the progress of medical tourism in the city of Cuenca.

Product Evaluation

Cuenca offers its international demand health services in all areas, with high-end facilities, trained staff and very attractive packages. One of the challenges of participating clinics and the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca is to assemble complete tour packages to meet each of the needs of the tourist and also

that these packages can be specially catered for the tourist who does not want all the services offered in the complete package.

This proposed international marketing will launch on the market those health services with increased demand according to the clinics and participating hospitals. It is noteworthy to mention that the medical programs are general checkups. If a patient requires more complicated interventions, the cost will vary according to the individual patient needs and the tours offered by domestic travel agencies "Verde Pais" and "Apullacta" are popular tours, specific demands involve higher costs. However those who access medical services through the medical tourism plan in Cuenca, receive discounts, same to be discussed by the 5 participating clinics and hospitals.

According to the Central Bank of Ecuador the cumulative inflation for the month of September 2014 is 4.19 (Central Bank of Ecuador, 2014). This is the value that will increase the costs of the packages offered by the new international medical tourism plan. In the following pictures you can see the approximate prices that this research proposes.

MALE ABOVE 35 YEARS OF AGE	
Laboratory:	Valores
RBC, Hemoglobin, Hematocrit, Leukocytes, SCH CBC, Platelets	\$ 11,00
Prothrombin T2	\$ 6,00
Ac. Helicobacter Pylori	\$ 15,00
Urea	\$ 2,50
Glucose	\$ 2,50
Creatinine	\$ 2,50
Uric Acid	\$ 2,50
Cholesterol	\$ 2,50
HDL Cholesterol	\$ 2,50
LDL Cholesterol	\$ 2,50
Triglycerides	\$ 2,50
GTO	\$ 3,00
GTP	\$ 3,00
Alkaline Phosphatase	\$ 3,00
A.C Embryonic	\$ 18,00
A.F. Protein	\$ 18,00
PSA test	\$ 17,00
Urine (physical, chemical and sediment)	\$ 4,00
Feces (parasitology)	\$ 3,00
X Rays:	
Rx. St. Thoracic	\$ 27,00
Superior Abdomen Ultrasound	\$ 30,00
Other:	
Initial and closing Clinical Evaluation	\$ 22,00
Spirometry	\$ 37,00
Electrocardiogram	\$ 27,00
Nutritional Assessment	\$ 16,00
Urological Assessment	\$ 22,00
Stress Test	\$ 75,00
Audiometry	\$ 16,00

Personal Source

FEMALE ABOVE 35 YEARS OF AGE	
Laboratory:	Valores
RBC, Hemoglobin, Hematocrit, Leukocytes, SCH CBC, Platelets	\$ 12,00
Prothrombin T2	\$ 6,00
Ac. Helicobacter Pylori	\$ 15,00
Urea	\$ 2,50
Glucose	\$ 2,50
Creatinine	\$ 2,50
Uric Acid	\$ 2,50
Cholesterol	\$ 2,50
HDL Cholesterol	\$ 2,50
LDL Cholesterol	\$ 2,50
Triglycerides	\$ 2,50
GTO	\$ 2,50
GTP	\$ 3,00
Alkaline Phosphatase	\$ 3,00
FT3	\$ 12,00
FT4	\$ 12,00
TSH test	\$ 12,00
Urine (physical, chemical and sediment)	\$ 4,00
Feces (parasitology)	\$ 3,00
X Rays:	
Rx. St. Thoracic	\$ 30,00
Mammography	\$ 45,00
Other:	
Initial and closing Clinical Evaluation	\$ 22,00
Spirometry	\$ 15,00
Electrocardiogram	\$ 27,00
Nutritional Assessment	\$ 16,00
Gynecological Assessment	\$ 22,00
Stress Test	\$ 75,00
Audiometry	\$ 16,00

Personal Source

MEDICAL CHECKUP MAN OR FEMALE	
Medical Checkup Executive B	
Laboratory:	Valores
Blood count	12,00
Cholesterol	3,00
Triglycerides	2,50
Cholesterol LDL	2,50
Cholesterol HDL	2,50
Glucose	2,50
Physical , Chemical and Urine Sediment	3,50
VDRL	3,50
Blood count	27,00
Cholesterol	35,00
Others:	
Electroencefalograma	65,00
Electrocardiograma	27,00
Audiometría	16,00
Valoración Oftalmológica	16,00

Personal Source

MEDICAL CHECKUP MAN OR FEMALE	
Medical Checkup Executive C	
Laboratorio:	Valores
Blood count	12,00
Cholesterol	2,50
Triglycerides	2,50
Cholesterol LDL	2,50
Cholesterol HDL	2,50
Glucose	2,50
Physical , Chemical and Urine Sediment	3,50
VDRL	3,50
Blood count	27,00
Others:	
Audiometry	16,00

Personal Source

Although these would be the main products, as mentioned it offers a program of general medical tourism, which combines:

- ✓ Consultations, treatments or interventions in all medical areas.
- ✓ Highly trained professionals
- ✓ 1st Class Hospital Infrastructure

- ✓ Conventional tourism to notable places like Ingapirca, Cajas, Gualaceo, Chordeleg, Yunguilla and others.
- ✓ Relaxation tourism in spas and hot springs

Competition Evaluation

Quito

The capital of Ecuador is the strongest in both quality and development of its medical infrastructure as well as logistical issues such as: having an international airport, variety and extent of hotel infrastructure and recognition of its historical center as Cultural Heritage Site. For anyone interested in practiced treatment or medical intervention in Ecuador and refers to Internet search, Quito definitely is going to be the first to appear over Cuenca, for ease of the arrival from anywhere in the world thanks to its international airport, and the information on medical professionals, clinics and hospitals that can be easily found on the web.

Quito is a strong city in competition, including national and international recognition that their hospitals have obtained, for example. Eugenio Espejo Hospital is endorsed by the World Health Organization, the Metropolitano Hospital of Quito is a member of Medical Tourism Asociation and Join Commision International. (Hospital Metropolitano, 2014).

The websites of both of these hospitals are prepared in English and Spanish, this minor differences mark a difference for tourists at the moment to choose an option for their medical purposes. In this aspect Quito is ahead of Cuenca in the developing of web information.

Colombia

Ecuador borders to the north with Colombia, this country has slowly been gaining ground in international medical tourism, although even many of its hospitals and clinics are in the process of international accreditations as stated by the official travel guide Colombia, Colombia Travel, "Colombia is projected as one of the top destinations in Latin America in medical tourism." (Colombia Travel, 2014). Due to the high cost of medicine in the United States and Europe, Colombia saw an

opportunity to offer the international market health system that enjoys great standards. Colombia travel states:

"Medical tourism in Colombia has been rated as world class and is predicted to be in a very short time line of significant generator of foreign economy. Although there are no exact figures on plastic surgery, for example, it is estimated that about twenty foreigners a month arrive to undergo procedures such as liposuction. Many of these patients come from the US, Spain, Panama and Mexico."

Although Colombia has the same problem as Ecuador, which is the lack of control mechanisms and regulation of medical tourism, within their plan they have suggested to focus more on what they call the Wellness Tourism, an idea which initially drew much attention for Cuenca, considering changing the focus of the medical tourism plan to wellness tourism.

However according to Andres Ochoa this idea just came in words and random thoughts that were never treated seriously. Colombia has used its international prestige especially in plastic surgery to attract the attention on international tourists who either lack resources or are just looking to economize their expenses on quality options for their interventions.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica has an official website of medical tourism, www.turismomedico.org the same that is available to everyone, information regarding the services that this country offers to tourists, besides news and features that support the seriousness and progress of medical tourism in Costa Rica.

According to the above page, recognizing what this country has become internationally in medical tourism services has accelerated the development of improved services and improved hospital infrastructure. They decided to innovate and not only offer services in conventional medicine but offer a mixture of holistic medicine and thus help treat what are known as "new diseases" such as stress or depression, thereby they pressured the entire hotel system, clinics, hospitals and recovery centers to raise their standards. (Turismomedico.org, 2014)

Costa Rica receives more demand for dental care, bariatric and orthopedic, the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism estimates that tourists interested in medical tourism spend six times more than the conventional tourist therefore increasingly attracting these tourists would greatly help the country's economy. (Turismomedico.org, 2014)

On the other hand Promed Resources, an official website of medical tourism, states that it is estimated that the country receives about 100,000 tourists each year who undergo some type of medical procedure. (Promed Resources, 2011). This figure indicates that medical tourism is increasing for this country, and that when there is much information that tourists can research both online and in leaflets, Through its quality services Costa Rica has gradually become the leading medical tourism in Latin America.

Review of logistics

The products offered in Cuenca medical tourism plan will be promoted through various channels. However these channels will be in charge of publicizing the treatments, interventions, professionals and tour packages. At the moment there is a channel known as ECUAMED operating in Canada who have agreements with St. Ines Hospital in Cuenca to sell medical tourism plans directly to tourists.

ECUAMED.- ECUAMED is proposed as a tool of one of the direct sales channels worldwide. Cristina Alcívar in charge of this website will receive all the information required by travel agents and the 5 clinics and hospitals to be able to continue with his mediation in Canada.

Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca.- Their role is only to present the offer that Cuenca has in their plan for medical tourism. However on the web link which they manage there will exist links routed to each of the clinics and hospitals websites, where they can buy and consult on treatments and interventions via online.

Five clinics and participating hospitals.- Each participating hospital or clinic will create a website with relevant information for tourists interested in it and a link where they can contact the person in charge of coordinating the project in the different participating centers.

The fact that these are intangible products and in many cases customized products it can be very difficult to put packages together, that is why we have opted for packages of general review and to maintain direct communication between patients and clinics or hospitals for specific needs. It will need a coordinator in charge at each clinic and hospital because they need to be those with knowledge of what medical services can be offered.

Furthermore, this research project proposes that this subject is handled until at least 2016, to analyze how effective these channels are.

Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Strengths: Cuenca in the last five years has received several international tourism awards, which will undoubtedly help boost tourism to the city, in the year 2014 a report presented by the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca through its magazine "Cuenca Ilustre" they mention some of the major awards, among which are:

- ✓ 2008- number 1 for visit and stay - Stern Magazine
- ✓ 2008- Number 49 most important historical city - National Geographic
- ✓ 2010- Top 10 must see cities - Lonely Planet
- ✓ 2012- Number 21 selected destinations by tourist in Latin America – Trip Advisor
- ✓ 2012- Best place for retired north American ex pats CNN, Money United States
- ✓ 2013- 2014 Best city of the future due to costs of living Mejor ciudad del futuro - Foreign Direct Investment
- ✓ 2013- Award “Jean Paul-L’Allier”
- ✓ 2014 – Best destination for adventure - Outside-Travel Awards

(Cuenca Magazine, 2014)

In addition to these recognitions, Cuenca has some very strong natural attractions, such as the natural hot springs, which are very useful for certain diseases, these places are often recommended by physicians as part of recovery therapies for certain surgeries or after fractures.

Weaknesses: The city of Cuenca still lacks an international airport, which complicates the direct arrival of foreign tourists, who must first reach the airport in Quito or Guayaquil and then find the best way for their arrival in Cuenca which undoubtedly creates extra expenses for the tourist.

The lack of language skills of health professionals is also a weakness, although most of the specialists speak some English, other staff such as nurses, aides, administrative staff etc. do not have these skills.

The lack of international promotion by hospitals, clinics and travel agencies also affects the information on medical tourism in Cuenca and tourists do not have the information needed to make a journey for health.

The city does not have well equipped recovery centers, places where people can have attention for recovery after their surgeries or treatments. Instead we have Hotels located in old houses that mostly do not have elevators, which complicates the place of lodging for the patient.

Opportunities: Cuenca has a virtue with the hospital system that is at the forefront of developed countries and that are constantly updated, these changes are evident when visiting participating clinics and hospitals.

On the other hand having hot springs located in Baños, attracts the attention of tourists, they can take a 10 minute drive to the very well known natural healing waters. Creating new spas in the city like "Piedra de Agua" and "Novaqua" centers offers a new concept in relaxation treatments, that are widely used by those seeking places to relax and treat their stress.

Threats: currently the main threat to the city of Cuenca is the lack of government support for this project because this means that the 5 hospitals and clinics involved in the project have to organize their ideas on their own without a neutral organization that can help organize and control. This is due to legal reprisals that may arise either from international tourists or other non-participating clinics, so the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca should raise clear awareness of their role in the project as a means to promote the new offering in medical tourism in Cuenca, but not as an entity that supports practice in the area of health.

On the other hand, considered that the issue of health takes a more prominent role in society and the current government in its plan of good living with the proposal that health is free, some tourists begin to access this system.

It was found at the Vicente Corral Moscoso Hospital, where they receive foreign patients from neighboring countries like Colombia and Peru and some of North America and Europe on a daily basis. If there is not any regulation for the access of a free health system, we would have a very strong threat in our own city.

Problems

- Lack of language skills of the professionals in the health area
- Lack of specialized centers for the recovery of patients
- Lack of interest by the participating entities

Marketing Strategy

This paper proposes a strategy of Mixed Marketing , "this strategy shows us how we compete, the basic competitive advantage, through which they can achieve the required positioning" (Lopez, 2010) the following will be described through what is known as the 4Ps of marketing.

a) Leadership in prices (Price)

Internationally, the cost of medical services offered in Cuenca is much lower compared to countries like USA, Canada, Spain and England, identified as countries of origin for most tourists to Ecuador. This advantage will attract a market that sees an opportunity to save money on their treatments, medical interventions or take the opportunity to learn about another country and acquire medical checkups.

b) Differentiation (Product)

Cuenca unlike its main competition such as the city of Quito and countries like Colombia and Costa Rica does not only provide medical tourism, it also offers a number of options for tourism like relaxation both ancestral and alternative. The most important differentiation is to have international recognition in the area of

tourism that attracts tourists who see Cuenca as a propitious place to relax and recover from medical treatments while enjoying their visit. Cuenca offers a first class health infrastructure, advanced technology, qualified professionals, spas and unique natural attractions. Also thanks to this proposal it is expected to have a plan for tourism and tourists know that Cuenca is ready to welcome foreigners who seek quality medical services at lower prices than those of their homeland.

c) Segmentation (Plaza)

One strategy that this present study indicates is to direct ourselves to a market segment, as defined, most tourists entering Ecuador come from Colombia, United States, Peru, Spain, England and Venezuela. The promotions will go to these countries but we cannot neglect the tourist market already in Ecuador, because most of those do not have knowledge about the new type of tourism focused on health in Cuenca. Therefore we will have local and international advertising campaigns to capture these two market segments.

d) Marketing Communication Strategy (Promotion)

It is the most important medical tourism strategy plan it will be detailed in depth in section 3.3 of this research.

Market Research

You will need to use a constant market research to see how the project evolves and know the features and benefits that involve the tourists. You will need to have to test market feedback, surveys, control systems admission of patients at each clinic or hospital, and quarterly reports by the participating entities to help assist with the actual situation of the project.

It is also considered necessary to conduct research on brand awareness to determine efficacy in the messages transmitted in different media; finally studies are needed in customer satisfaction to evaluate the market reaction to the proposed new strategy international marketing approach quantitative research will have to be direct with the patients. The website can keep track where it quantifies how many tourists have purchased packages, treatments, consultations and interventions in each of the participating clinics and hospitals, while for those patients who arrive directly to

every clinic or hospital, secretaries will be responsible for carrying out a small survey consisting of:

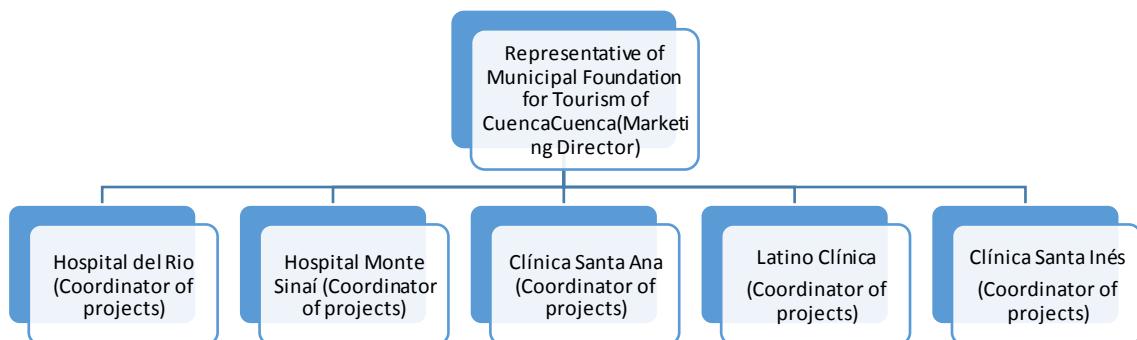
- ✓ Name and Last Name
- ✓ Country of origin.
- ✓ Were you aware of the medical tourism plan?
- ✓ If your answer is affirmative, please indicate how you became aware of this plan?

These forms will be found in both English and Spanish.

At the end of three months a report that indicates how many foreigners were received will be given, their country of origin and how they came to know about the medical tourism plan. Each secretary will send this report to the project coordinator of each clinic and hospital. This will tell us if the promotion is being effective and what country the most patients come from.

Marketing Organization

It is definitely strictly necessary to determine who will be in charge of the marketing plan within the medical tourism. Therefore a tentative outline of the structure of responsible marketing area is presented.



Personal Source

Representative of the Municipal Foundation for Tourism for of Cuenca (Director of Marketing)

It is required to designate the person in charge of the management of the advertising campaign that has been proposed, that person could be a representative of the

Municipal Foundation, as this is the entity responsible to promote the new tourism in Cuenca.

However it will be the advertising agency which handles the web portals, the information managed will be sent by each participating entity, but experts will seek the best way to present this information. They will work with Outsourcing in the marketing issue, but there will be a delegate to take charge of the control and the direct contact with the contracted company.

Project Coordinators

Each participant clinic or hospital, will delegate a person who is in charge of coordinating the project internally, this is the person who will be in direct contact with stakeholders in medical tourism, they can provide information on costs, specialists and infrastructure also they have contact with participating travel agencies (Verde Pais and Apullacta) to give a disclosed conventional tourism option which Cuenca offers. This person should handle at least two languages English and Spanish.

Action programs

The international marketing strategy for medical tourism in Cuenca aims to launch the plan in 2015. The action plans, which will be carried out in the last 6 months of 2015 to achieve its objectives, are detailed as follows:

June: A print and radio advertising campaign will be launched for the month of June, focusing on tourists from different countries visiting Cuenca who are in search of good places for interventions or treatments. The control system and monitoring of patients arriving at participating hospitals and clinics will be launched, it will consist of recording the number of people entering the website, number of purchases online, persons entering for outpatient and emergency.

July: A digital campaign will start with the development of web portals and publications in international media specializing in medical tourism. This will be done in the early days of August. Further announcements will be developed on the site Gringo Tree, targeting those who are in search of places with high medical standards

and affordable costs for their treatments or procedures. It will seek to reach mainly countries of Colombia, US, Canada, Spain, Germany and Venezuela.

August: As soon as the advertising campaigns are developed we will seek to identify the best products and packages, to launch promotions with discounts during the month of September and October. This will be known by the first report of results of the strategy by the coordinators of each clinic or hospital.

That report will help us understand what has been the impact of the project and to identify possible failures. The participating organizations will be prepared to participate in the FITE (International Tourism Fair in Ecuador) 2015, which may be held in the month of September.

September: Videos will be developed with accounts of the experiences of some tourists who have agreed to the plan of medical tourism. These videos will be posted on the website that was developed in July. The project of Medical Tourism in Cuenca will also participate in the 2015 FITE international markets to expose the new concept of medical tourism in Cuenca.

October: During this month we will work on the web portals and the page ECUAMED (Canada), uploading pictures, videos, news on hospitals, patients experience, etc. An interactive blog will be developed where patients can interact.

November: a second report on the impact of the strategy and detail of changes will be necessary to succeed. It is considered important to carry out new print and radio ads focused on those changes made. These ads will be launched during November and December.

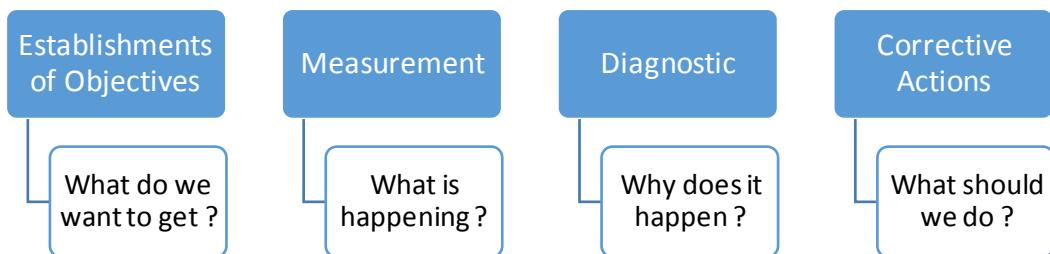
December: The first week of this month a report on the results will be developed. The participation in the FITE 2015, we will begin to discuss those international accreditations needed for each participant clinic to stay ahead internationally. Accreditations and those granted by the Joint Commission, the Medical Tourism Association or International, the most recognized are:

- ✓ International Patient Services CertificationTM for Hospitals and Clinics
- ✓ International Patient Center Training
- ✓ Certified International Patient Specialist

- ✓ Certified Medical Tourism Professional

Controls

For the elaboration of the control, the following points are taken into account:



Source: (González, 2014)

It is necessary to know what the answers are to the strategies proposed for the medical tourism plan in Cuenca. For this, the number of visits to the web portal, the number of consultations via internet, number of packages sold, number of external patients will be accounted for, the ways they came to learn about the medical tourism plan in Cuenca, like publications in journals on medical tourism in Cuenca, especially in: The Medical Tourism Magazine, GAO Travel and Tourism Magazine and the Journal of Mercosur.

Through the above mentioned we will determine which is the public response to new strategies and modifications that can be made on the original plan and strategies of minor or major importance. These corrective actions can be performed improving the message about medical tourism in Cuenca and expanding the media.

The Five Forces of Porter

To complement what Kotler proposes, in his book "Marketing" we will also analyze the 5 forces of Porter

1. Rivalry and market competition

- Quito
- Colombia
- Costa Rica

2. Threat of new entrants

- Public Hospitals in the city of Cuenca
- Hospitals and clinics that are not within medical tourism plan
- Other Latin American countries that want to diversify their tourism.

3. Bargaining power of customers

- Tourists always require medical treatment and class medical process of first level, but with significant savings compared to their countries of origin.

4. Threat of new products or services

- Many places do not address medical tourism under that name, some call it wellness tourism, relaxation tourism, etc. However there are no products to replace what the present study raises, medical tourism, both conventional and alternative medicine and relaxation through tours and spas has a differentiation advantage.

5. Bargaining power of suppliers

- The 5 participating hospitals, will apply the same prices to beneficiaries in conventional medical tourism packages set out in this plan.
- Each participating entity that provides a service such as clinics, hospitals and travel agencies will have the power to negotiate custom packages according to customer needs.

Since the strongest and most relevant point for the success of the plan for medical tourism in Cuenca is the promotion it gives itself, it was decided to raise a detailed international communication strategy, to assist the development and existence of the plan.

3.3 Strategy for international communication for the developed plan

To develop international communication strategy for the plan of medical tourism in Cuenca, we will follow the 4 steps José Antonio Paris mentions in his book "Marketing International - from the Latin American perspective" these being: Fixing the objectives, budget decisions, decisions about media and decisions about the message. (Paris, 2008)

Setting goals

- Achieve 3 positive publications favorable to Cuenca as a destination for medical tourism 2015 in the journal The Medical Tourism Magazine, GAO Travel and Tourism Magazine and the Journal of Mercosur
- Develop 4 packages of medical tourism in Cuenca and sell 20 of each of these packages in 2015 in each of the participating clinics and hospitals.
- Improve access to the information for tourists in 2015, through bilingual national and international promotion in print, television, radio and digital media, achieve to enroll 1,000 patients in the plan of medical tourism in Cuenca

Decisions on budget

In 2011, participating hospitals and clinics in the Medical Tourism project for Cuenca, together contributed \$ 15,000; that was used for advertising campaigns through different media and tourism fairs.

To develop a relevant advertising campaign, it is logical to require a higher amount of money, this must be negotiated directly between hospitals, clinics and the Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca

Long-term action plans depend on this negotiation, but some short-term actions that could start taking place have been analyzed. Within those options the participation in the FITE (International Tourism Fair of Ecuador), the registration to have a place in this fair varies between \$ 1,270 and \$ 4,390 and is a valuable opportunity to present to Ecuador and the participating countries on the new proposal. This is a fair open to everybody and developed in September 2014 in the city of Guayaquil. Still a date for the next FITE or city in which it will develop is unknown, but this fair is held annually, so it is suggested to be aware of the issue in order to participate in this fair in 2015.

It is very difficult to determine an exact sum of money that clinics and hospitals should provide individually. But a start could be presenting and reviewing a budget for advertising key points that will help explain where the money will be used by the institutions. Detailed below is the first budget draft on how much is needed to invest in advertising with international projection for medical tourism in Cuenca.

PROMOCIONAL PLAN		
ACTIVITY	CHARACTERISTICS	COST
BROCHURES and FLYERS	8.000 Brochures 50.000 Flyers 3.500 Stubs Material Distribution: Clinics: 500 Brochures 3.000 flyers and 300 Stubs to each clinic. Fairs and events: 2.000 Brochures and 10.000 flyers 1.000 Stubs 2.500 photos, 25.000 flyers y 1.000 stubs.	\$ 4.523
PUBLICATIONS IN REVISTA VISTAZO	June and November 2015 (\$1.667,20 each)	\$3.334.4
PUBLICATION IN REVISTA HOGAR	June – July y November - December 2015 (\$ 1.356 each)	\$2.712
ELABORATION OF A JINGLE FOR RADIO	Music 30 seg.	\$ 150
RADIO SONORAMA - NATIONAL	241 times of 30" for 35 days (June - July) and (November - December) (\$ 2.500 each)	\$5.000
DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN OF WEB PORTAL	Development , maintenance and updating of web portal for 6 months	\$ 2.100
COMMITMENT AND ADVERTISING ON THE INTERNET	Google, MNS, Bing y Yahoo	\$ 168
PUBLICATION IN REVISTA "MEDICAL TOURISM MAGAZINE" and "REVISTA GAO"	June- July of 2015	\$1.800 - \$8.000
PARTICIPATION IN FITE 2015	Básic Stand	\$1.270
TOTAL		\$21.057,40 / \$27.257.40

Personal Source

The budget of the pilot project was considered, however some international points of important relevance were increased for this new strategy and advertising in international journals and development of a website on medical tourism in Cuenca in

English and Spanish. It should be noted that this is an initial draft, which is subject to change based on ideas or points of each of the participating entities.

Media Decisions

The media is a very important part that should be discussed with caution, certainly the media that is decided as part of this plan play an extremely important role in the impact of this campaign. Here are some important media that must be taken into account for publicity.

The Medical Tourism Magazine.- It is known as the "voice" of the medical tourism industry, it allows all stakeholders to know more about this industry and share experiences, developments and ideas. The publications can be found in print and online, allowing the The Medical Tourism Magazine to have a fairly comprehensive read to the market, although most of their print magazines are aimed at clinics, hospitals and various health centers around world. (The Medical Tourism Magazine, 2014)

GAO Magazine.- is a magazine for the tourism industry, with monthly publications uninterrupted for the past 33 years. Their presence in the market has allowed it to maintain a leadership position, receiving an international recognition. With the advancement of technology, GAO has established itself as a comprehensive publication, information and current issues related to international tourism. (Journal Gao, 2014). GAO is one of the oldest journals in tourism, read around the world for its projection and prestige, to have a publication based on medical tourism in Cuenca, is relevant.

Travel and Tourism Magazine of Mercosur. - This magazine is distributed to over 50,000 contacts around the world, it is available to the general public and has registered several articles in 23 different languages. So its international impact is also important and currently has several stories about Cuenca, its hot springs and cuisine. (The Journal of Mercosur, 2013)

Gringo Tree.- This is a website that allows advertising all kinds of news, it is handled in two ways, you can pay for advertising that consists of photos and notes or you can enter only text notes for no cost. This is a web site where users can interact,

and comment, share experiences and recommend places. Although operated for just five years, it has been widely accepted by foreign visitors who come to this page for news about the city, places to eat, lodging and the most relevant and general interest like news that is published daily. (Gringo Tree, 2013)

Websites of each clinic or hospital.- During the course of this research clinics and hospitals that drove the plan of medical tourism in Cuenca have a great and valuable work within their websites updating their information and giving the opportunity for tourists to have all the information in English; however it is worth noting that El Rio Hospital, Santa Ana and Santa Inés clinics, have had a faster advancement, with publications in two languages, accreditation, easy access to information about services and advertising within their pages, but these advances have been achieved individually, not as a group or partners in a project, creating competitive advantages for themselves.

Decisions about the message

The promotion projected to increase medical tourism in the city of Cuenca has an important role because of how tourists perceive this promotion and depending on this it will help them make their decisions in the future. Therefore José Antonio Paris tells us in his book Marketing International "message is the hub of international communication, because it is tied directly to the company it maintains communication with your target market. It's what the market says to the company, nothing more, and nothing less"

For the author, to make a decision about the message we should take into consideration 3 key points: message content, message structure and message format.

Message content: The initial message must be direct and clear, "Medical Tourism in Cuenca, Ecuador" however keep in mind that not all people are aware about the term "medical tourism" thus a slogan which is more understandable is necessary "Quality Medical in Ecuador" accompanied by an explanatory text where the most outstanding medical activities requested by tourist in Ecuador are summarized. Thus the tourist knows what the medical tourism project is about and what role has been played by Ecuador in this subject in recent years.

The role taken by the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca at the moment to expose the message they want the tourist receive, being a public entity it must be handled with subtlety its role as an entity that is releasing the diversity of touristic offers that Cuenca has, but not specifically endorsing a doctor or a clinic or hospital.

According to the lawyer Miguel Sarmiento, the role and how this government institution advertises Medical Tourism Cuenca should be treated with caution, it should be clear to the public that the Foundation is only revealing the diversity of tourism in Cuenca, describing the participating health centers, the tours that can be accessed and especially presenting the global market that Cuenca has to offer.

It should be noted that the participating clinics and hospitals must meet legal parameters previously negotiated and established among all participating institutions, to thereby ensure that participating health centers have professional competence, adequate infrastructure and legal backing for the project. Therefore when creating information within the website of the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca the wording should be clear and not give rise to the misinterpretation that the Foundation supports medical practice, and clinics, but it only provides information of a new proposal for tourism.

Message Structure: The message must reach the tourist interested in medical tourism and it should indicate the medical services that the city of Cuenca has are high quality, safe and a good price. That is why all promotional material must be accompanied by real testimonies of the beneficiaries of medical treatment in Cuenca. Additionally, the various international recognitions participating hospitals have must be include

To be more specific, each hospital should include on their websites a link that re routes to a site where tourists can find this information about medical tourism is the progress of hospitals and clinics on this topic, international accreditations and endorsements, real testimonies and the primary medical services which are offered. Finally, on this site for medical tourism there should be additional information and relevant data about Cuenca, types of accommodation, transport, sightseeing tours offers so that tourists can plan their trip.

In the case of printed material such as pamphlets, this information must be synthesized in such a way that it draws attention and urges them to do more research on the medical tourism plan in Cuenca, being a plan with an international focus. Most of the market targets know the subject through the internet or through international journals.

Message format: This point is very important to consider. As José Antonio Paris says "the challenge is to present the message in a way that responds to the meanings that have been detected in the mind of the prospective customer" (Paris, 2008)

That is why we have designed a logo and slogan sketch, which is subject to changes and suggestions from the participating institutions, the same shall be included in all print and web advertising.



Personal Source



Source: (Town Hall of Cuenca, 2011)

Conclusions and Recommendations

- The pilot plan to promote medical tourism in Cuenca was not successful because of the lack of necessary media to control and monitor the development, nor was it reanalyzed to understand what changes or adjustments should be performed since 2011.
- This research project, proposed the development of a marketing strategy with an international focus based on the pilot plan developed in 2011. Cuenca has advantages in this area of consideration, for example the factor of costs and quality compared with North America and Europe. Tourist attractions were also considered, especially natural attractions such as are its natural hot springs used in different areas for physical therapy and rehabilitation.
- Learning about the mistakes found in the pilot plan which was released nationwide, this time have led to means for controlling and monitoring the project, such as accounting for visits to web portals, quarterly reports by the coordinators in charge of the project plan in each clinic and hospital, accounting for outpatients, and targeted surveys to measure satisfaction and the impact of the international marketing strategy.
- It is also recommended to plant awareness in the participating clinics and hospitals about international accreditations and recognitions that they should apply for with the purpose to improve their international prestige. This was provided a level of confidence to the tourists who are interested in medical tourism.
- The proposed strategy is a mixed marketing strategy in product, price, place and promotion. However the most important part is the communication strategy that will arise both in national media as radio and newspapers, magazines and international media as medical tourism magazines, tourism fairs and web portals.
- We will work together with an advertising company, who will collaborate on the development of web portals and will register the amount of patients in internal and

external consultations. Furthermore, the number of visits to the portals will be counted and together with the director of marketing they will make adjustments to the portals by updating the information provided seeking new ways to attract the attention of tourists.

- There will be inter-institutional agreements between participating institutions where the role of the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca, which is solely to publicize the new touristic offer that Cuenca has will be specified.
- Training for doctors in at least one language, and participating medical professionals and support staff will be sought. If not provided with sufficient skills to communicate, it is the duty of every clinic and hospital to find at least 3 translators who can assist tourists if needed. These translators will be called whenever they are needed for their work and assistance.
- The coordinators of each clinic and hospital will be responsible for developing quarterly reports. Quarterly meetings with the involved entities where they will review the influx of tourists who use the medical services in Cuenca and how many of them know about the medical tourism plan.
- Surveys and focus groups will be conducted to learn about the project acceptance and directly meet those points that can be improved to provide better quality services.
- Finally, a clear and direct logo and slogan that can appeal to tourists will be developed. For this we have proposed a draft that can be discussed amongst the entities and the hired advertising company.

Annex 1

Interview for the Municipal Foundation for Tourism of Cuenca

- How did the idea of medical tourism occur in Cuenca?
- Who promoted this idea?
- Who is part of this plan?
- In addition to clinics and hospitals, what other institutions form part of the project?
- What are some of the main results that have been evidenced with the plan of medical tourism?
- What are the main advantages that the Foundation believes medical tourism provides in Cuenca? Social-technological-economic
- What are the main disadvantages the Foundation believes that medical tourism presents in Cuenca? Social-technological-economic
- What are the objectives of the Foundation to promote medical tourism?
- Does the Foundation plan to develop a final plan for medical tourism?
- How do you think the Foundation can develop a plan for medical tourism with an international focus?
- Does the current plan have international impact?
- What have been the main reactions of the parties involved?
- Does the Foundation have future plans for Medical Tourism?

Annex 2

Interviews for Clinics and Hospitals

- How did the idea of getting involved in medical tourism occur?
- Since what year has your institution been involved?
- Since you became part this project, what are the main benefits that have been experienced?
- What are the main negative experiences that you have experienced?
- What action plans have been taken to increase medical tourism?
- Have they involved international recognition or training?
- Have doctors and other professionals working in the clinic or hospital taken part in a course for international patient care?
- Have you developed some internal strategy for promoting services internationally?
- In relation to technology and equipment of clinical use, have there been changes because they are part of the plan for medical tourism?

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