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ΕΡΕΥΝΗΤΙΚΗ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ

The attitudes of specialists towards medical tourism and *in vitro* fertilization medical tourism services in Cyprus

OBJECTIVE To investigate the attitudes of the Cypriot specialists in the field of medical tourism towards medical tourism and assisted reproduction, and specifically, *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) medical tourism services and the associated marketing activities. **METHOD** A cross-sectional study was conducted from March to June 2018. The study population consisted of 50 specialists in the field of medical tourism who completed a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was based on a systematic literature review and a qualitative study with 10 specialists who participated in semi-structured interviews. Demographic characteristics were used as the independent variables, and the dependent variables were: (a) Characteristics of medical tourists looking for IVF services in Cyprus, (b) reasons for choosing Cyprus for IVF services, (c) the specialists' attitudes towards medical tourism and IVF, and (d) the specialists' attitudes towards the marketing of medical tourism and IVF. **RESULTS** The mean age of the participants was 47.2 years, and their mean experience was 13.2 years. Most of the participants were women (62%), had a postgraduate degree (58%) and were working in the private sector (78%). The social, demographic and economic characteristics of medical tourists seeking IVF services in Cyprus were reported to be: couples of average or higher economic and social status, higher educational level, religious beliefs and young couples. The most important reasons for medical tourists to choose Cyprus for IVF services were: the improvement in success rates and safety of IVF procedures, the low cost, the state-of-the-art technology, the favorable climatic conditions, the convenient geographical location and the prevailing political stability in Cyprus. A strong positive attitude towards medical tourism and IVF services was associated with a strong positive attitude towards the accompanying marketing activities. **CONCLUSIONS** Healthcare providers in Cyprus should be accredited and certified in medical tourism services and policy makers should establish and implement specialist training programs. Cyprus should invest in the development of IVF medical tourism services, by offering also personalized services, according to the specific characteristics of the medical tourists.

Medical tourism refers to the need of people suffering from mild or severe illnesses to travel to other countries in order to have access to high quality medical care services that are not available in their own country, due to lack of infrastructure, expertise, etc.¹ Medical tourism constitutes a growing industry on the global market, with particularly high performance and profitability ratios.² Investment

in medical tourism is continually increasing, and several companies and consulting companies are directing their investment initiatives towards this field, and currently there are more than 50 countries where medical tourism contributes to the profits of the national economy.³

Traditionally, Cyprus has welcomed mainly middle-income class tourists and professionals from the financial,

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Οι στάσεις των ειδικών αναφορικά με τον ιατρικό τουρισμό και τον τουρισμό σχετικά με την υποβοηθούμενη εξωσωματική γονιμοποίηση στην Κύπρο

Περίληψη στο τέλος του άρθρου

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insurance and real estate industries, but in the last few years a different picture has emerged. In particular, during the year 2013–2014, Russians spent € 107.5 per person per day, while Germans, who are traditional visitors to Cyprus, spent € 77.5 per person per day.⁴

In parallel, medical tourism has become established in Cyprus. Given that the incentive for people to improve their health is a priority,⁵ it is increasingly important to identify and assess the attitudes of the health professionals, and the capacity and potential of a country to develop this particular type of tourism, in combination with other efforts to attract higher tourist volumes and create synergies of growth with other sectors of the economy.

The reasons given for individuals to seek assisted reproduction, and specifically *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) services in another country vary widely. Cost disparities between the country of origin and the destination country, accessibility issues in the country of origin related to, e.g., long waiting lists, a non-flexible legal framework, and religious, political and societal issues challenging the delivery of specific health services, and in addition, demographic changes (e.g. increased life expectancy) and individual expectations are highlighted in the literature.^{6–12} On the other hand, the use of a common tongue, the provision of modern medical technology/health settings, highly-skilled medical and nursing staff, services of high quality (in terms of personalized care and amenities), accreditation of the services provided and a favorable and forward moving investment culture, are all factors which differentiate destination countries in attracting higher numbers of medical tourists looking for assisted reproduction services.^{13–16}

Most research in the field of IVF medical tourism services is general and is focused in EU countries, but limited research efforts have been directed towards defining the situation in Cyprus,^{17,18} and recent studies provide little reference to the development of assisted IVF technologies in Cyprus.^{19,20} It appears that the reasons for Cyprus attracting medical tourism in the field of IVF are, firstly, the high scientific level, as depicted by the high success rates, secondly the relatively low cost (half of the corresponding cost in other European countries and around one quarter of that in the United States), and thirdly, the legal framework regulating these interventions, which is rather liberal when compared for example, with the respective laws in Spain, Belgium and the United Kingdom.²¹

The aim of this study was to investigate the attitudes of Cypriot specialists in the field towards medical tourism and IVF medical tourism services and associated marketing activities.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Study design

A cross-sectional study was conducted from March 2018 to June 2018. The study population consisted of 50 specialists in the field of medical tourism, i.e., geneticists (n=2), health tourism officers (n=2), physicians (n=19), embryologists-fertility advisors (n=2), legal experts on IVF (n=1), medical tourism experts (n=6), health and medical tourism mediators (n=2), directors of private hospitals (n=1), health inspectors (n=2), politicians (n=3), and directors of IVF centers (n=4). A convenience sample was used, due to the limited number of experts in the field of medical tourism in Cyprus. Participants were informed about the study and gave their written consent. Personal data were not registered at any stage of the study. The study protocol was approved by the Cyprus National Bioethics Committee (Research Proposal 2016.01.24).

Measures

A structured questionnaire was completed by the participants. The questionnaire was created for this research project after a qualitative study. A systematic literature review was performed, based on which we constructed an interview guide that included 22 open questions, e.g., “what is medical tourism in your opinion?”, “what are the pros and cons of medical tourism in Cyprus?”, “what is your opinion about the costing of IVF in Cyprus?”, “what are the pros and cons of IVF in Cyprus?”, etc.²² Based on the guide, 10 experts participated in semi-structured interviews, on the transcripts of which content analysis was performed. The following themes emerged from the analysis: (a) The weaknesses in the development of medical tourism, (b) modern perceptions of, and trends in, the sustainable development of medical tourism services in Cyprus, (c) modern perceptions of, and trends in the sustainable development of IVF services in Cyprus, and (d) the implementation of policies for encouraging investment in IVF services. Face validity of the questionnaire was checked and only minor revisions were made.

A questionnaire with 74 items was created after the qualitative study, with items such as: “Medical tourism is travelling to another country in order to receive medical care”; “Cyprus as a destination country needs to increase its safety in terms of medical services”; “Cyprus is a reference and destination center of medical tourism for IVF services”; “IVF services in Cyprus are on a prominent development path”, etc. The items were answered on the following 5-point Likert scale: “completely disagree”, “disagree”, “neither disagree nor agree”, “agree”, and “completely agree”. Because of the small sample size and the limited variability of the participants’ answers, mean values were considered more representative and appropriate for drawing conclusions and, thus, are used throughout. In particular, items with mean response values of >4 were considered as elements of strong agreement, items with mean values between 3 and 4 were considered as elements of moderate agreement, items with mean values between 2 and 3 were considered as elements of moderate disagreement and items with mean values between 1 and 2 were considered as elements of marked disagreement.

Unfortunately, we were unable to perform factor analysis to reflect the variations in underlying variables due to the small sample size (at least 5 participants were required per item per scale). Nevertheless, according to the theory, we constructed the following two scales: (a) attitudes towards medical tourism and IVF services, and (b) attitudes towards the marketing of medical tourism and IVF services. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.84 and 0.7, respectively indicating acceptable to very good reliability of the questionnaire.

We then calculated the following scores: (a) A positive attitude score towards medical tourism and IVF services (ranging from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating a more positive attitude towards medical tourism and IVF), and (b) a positive attitude score towards the marketing of medical tourism and assisted IVF services (ranging from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating a more positive attitude towards the marketing of medical tourism and IVF).

Statistical analysis

Demographic data of the participants were collected, including gender, age, educational level, years of service and type of workplace (public or private).

Demographic characteristics were used as the independent variables. The dependent variables were: (a) Characteristics of medical tourists looking for IVF services in Cyprus, (b) reasons for choosing Cyprus for IVF services, (c) attitudes towards medical tourism and IVF, and (d) attitudes towards the marketing of medical tourism and IVF.

Continuous variables are presented as mean value, standard deviation (SD), median, minimum value, and maximum value, while categorical variables are presented as absolute (n) and relative (%) frequencies. The normality assumption was evaluated using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion, histograms and normal probability plots. Bivariate analyses were conducted, including Student's t-test, so as to investigate group differences within continuous variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient so as to investigate correlations between continuous variables, and Spearman's correlation coefficient so as to investigate relationships between continuous and ordinal variables and or between two continuous variables among which at least one did not follow the normal distribution. Unfortunately, it was not possible to conduct multivariate analyses due to the very small sample size of the study population. A two-sided p-value of 0.05 was considered as statistically significant and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software (IBM Corp, released 2012. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, version 21.0, Armonk, IBM Corp, New York) was used for data analysis.

RESULTS

Demographic characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the participating specialists are shown in table 1. Their mean age was 47.2

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study population of specialists associated with medical tourism (n=50).

| Characteristic | n | % |
|---------------------------------|-------|--------|
| <i>Gender</i> | | |
| Women | 31 | 62 |
| Men | 19 | 38 |
| <i>Age (years)</i> | 47.2* | 10.6** |
| <i>Level of education</i> | | |
| Secondary education certificate | 2 | 4 |
| Bachelor's degree | 1 | 2 |
| University degree | 14 | 28 |
| Postgraduate studies | 29 | 58 |
| PhD | 4 | 8 |
| <i>Years of experience</i> | 13.2* | 8.7** |
| <i>Type of workplace</i> | | |
| Public sector | 11 | 22 |
| Private sector | 39 | 78 |

* Mean, ** Standard deviation

years and their mean professional experience was 13.2 years. Most of the participants were women (62%), had a postgraduate degree (58%) and were working in the private sector (78%).

Characteristics of medical tourists looking for assisted IVF services in Cyprus

The social, demographic and economic specific characteristics of medical tourists seeking IVF services in Cyprus were prioritized by the respondents as follows: (a) Couples of average or higher economic and social status (mean=4.1, SD=0.7), (b) higher educational level (mean=3.9, SD=0.6), (c) religious beliefs (mean=3.3, SD=0.9) and (d) young couples (mean=2.6, SD=0.9). Bivariate analysis showed that specialists in the private sector were more likely to agree that a medical tourist is looking for IVF services in Cyprus regardless of socioeconomic status, age and level of education ($p < 0.001$).

Reasons for choosing Cyprus for IVF services

The reasons for choosing Cyprus for IVF services today were prioritized by the respondents as follows: (a) The success rates of the specialized health professionals (mean=3.8, SD=0.8), (b) the favorable climatic conditions, the convenient geographical location and political stability (mean=3.8, SD=0.8), (c) the continuing improvement in success rates (mean=3.7, SD=0.9), (d) the increased safety

of IVF procedures (mean=3.7, SD=0.8), (d) the provision of high quality services (mean=3.6, SD=0.9), (e) the low cost of IVF services (mean=3.6, SD=1), (f) the continuous and timely integration of new technologies into clinical practice (mean=3.4, SD=1).

Bivariate analysis revealed that university graduates were more likely to agree that medical tourists are currently choosing Cyprus for IVF services because of a steady improvement in success rates ($p=0.03$) and increased safety of the IVF procedures ($p=0.02$). Private sector specialists were more likely to agree that medical tourists are currently choosing Cyprus for IVF services because of low cost ($p=0.007$). More years of experience were associated with increased agreement

that medical tourists choose Cyprus for IVF services due to state-of-the-art technology ($r_s=0.32$, $p=0.03$). Less years of experience were associated with increased agreement that medical tourists choose Cyprus for IVF services due to the favorable climatic conditions, the convenient geographical location and political stability ($r_s=-0.28$, $p=0.049$).

Attitudes towards medical tourism and IVF services

The mean total positive attitude towards medical tourism and IVF score was 3.9 (SD=0.4), indicating a positive attitude of the respondents. The attitudes towards medical tourism and IVF services scale are shown in table 2. The participants disagreed moderately only with the follow-

Table 2. Attitudes of specialists towards medical tourism and *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) services in Cyprus, according to study questionnaire (each item rated 1–5).

| Item | Mean | SD | Median | Minimum value | Maximum value |
|--|------|-----|--------|---------------|---------------|
| Medical tourism is travelling to another country in order to receive medical care | 4.3 | 0.9 | 5 | 1 | 5 |
| Cyprus as a destination country needs to increase its safety in terms of medical services | 4.5 | 0.7 | 5 | 2 | 5 |
| The prospects for developing medical tourism in Cyprus are good | 4.2 | 0.9 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Cyprus should be interested in developing medical tourism as it is the best source of income with the least amount of investment | 3.4 | 1.0 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| Enhancing the sustainability of the private medical services industry due to the influx of patients from alternative markets beyond the domestic market is considered an advantage of developing medical tourism | 4.2 | 0.7 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Assisted IVF services are the most popular medical tourism services worldwide | 3.9 | 0.9 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Cyprus needs to invest in the development of medical tourism and especially assisted IVF services, as it may prove to be beneficial for its economy | 4.1 | 0.7 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Cyprus should address to countries with opposing religious beliefs to assisted IVF for the development of this type of medical tourism | 4.1 | 0.8 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Cyprus is a reference and destination center of medical tourism for assisted IVF services | 2.6 | 0.8 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Assisted IVF services in Cyprus are on a prominent development path | 3.5 | 0.8 | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| Private healthcare providers can play an important role in the development of in-patient assisted IVF services in Cyprus | 4.3 | 0.7 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Governmental bodies (such as the Cyprus Tourism Organization, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Energy, Trade, Industry and Tourism) can play an important role in the development of in-patient assisted IVF services in Cyprus | 4.2 | 0.7 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| Assisted IVF services can be a valuable so as to curb the intense touristic seasonality in Cyprus | 4.0 | 0.8 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis can become a tool for attracting medical tourists in Cyprus | 4.0 | 0.9 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| The role of medical coordinators-facilitators is crucial, as they offer packages (medical and travel services), medical advice and assessment of the patient's needs | 4.3 | 0.7 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| Hospital accreditation and certification play an important role in attracting medical tourists for assisted IVF services | 4.4 | 0.6 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| It is important for private and public hospitals in Cyprus to get accredited so as to ensure quality of care and patient safety | 4.6 | 0.6 | 5 | 3 | 5 |

Higher values indicate higher agreement

SD: Standard deviation

Table 2. (continued) Attitudes of specialists towards medical tourism and *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) services in Cyprus, according to study questionnaire (each item rated 1–5).

| Item | Mean | SD | Median | Minimum value | Maximum value |
|--|------|-----|--------|---------------|---------------|
| The legislative framework regarding assisted IVF services in Cyprus presents gaps and omissions | 3.9 | 0.9 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| There are legislative barriers in the development of assisted IVF services in Cyprus | 3.7 | 1.0 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| Human resource in assisted IVF services in Cyprus is relevantly trained | 2.9 | 1.1 | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| There is a significant need for specialization of health professionals in the management of medical tourists | 4.3 | 0.8 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Health professionals in Cyprus are qualified to support specialized assisted IVF services | 3.4 | 1.1 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| The hotel sector should play a role in the development of in-patient assisted IVF services in Cyprus by educating and sensitizing staff about the particular needs of the medical tourists | 4.0 | 0.6 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| The hotel should shape its support structures to become “medical tourism friendly” | 4.0 | 0.9 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| The extension of the holiday season in the country and supporting tourist companies are considered as an advantage in developing medical tourism | 4.0 | 1.0 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| The pricing policy in Cyprus on assisted IVF services is considered satisfactory and competitive | 3.3 | 1.0 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| The lack of sufficient certifications and objective therapeutic efficacy data in Cyprus is the main issue for attracting medical tourists for assisted IVF services | 3.6 | 0.9 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| The stay of a medical tourist seeking assisted IVF services can be part of a wider holiday package of mass tourism | 4.0 | 0.8 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| There must be development strategies in Cyprus on IVF tourism such as business growth, mergers and acquisitions | 3.9 | 0.7 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Total score | 3.9 | 0.4 | 3.9 | 3.3 | 4.8 |

Higher values indicate higher agreement

SD: Standard deviation

ing statements: (a) Cyprus is a reference and destination center of medical tourism for IVF services and (b) human resources in IVF services in Cyprus have relevant training.

No statistically significant relationship was found between demographic characteristics of the specialists and attitude towards medical tourism and IVF services (tab. 3). More years of experience were associated with a more strongly positive attitude towards medical tourism and IVF services ($r=0.22$, $p=0.1$).

Attitudes towards the marketing of medical tourism and IVF services

The mean total positive attitude towards the marketing of medical tourism and IVF services score was 3.1 ($SD=0.5$), indicating a moderately positive attitude on the part of the respondents. Their attitudes towards the marketing of medical tourism and IVF services are shown in table 4. Participants disagreed moderately only on the following statements: (a) There is a strategic planning for IVF services in Cyprus, (b) there is cooperation between tourism com-

panies and health centers providing IVF services and (c) specialized packages on IVF services are offered in Cyprus.

No statistically significant relationship was found between demographic characteristics and attitudes towards the marketing of medical tourism and IVF services (tab. 3). Fewer years of experience was associated with an increased positive attitude towards the marketing of medical tourism and IVF services ($r=-0.17$, $p=0.1$). In addition, an increased positive attitude towards medical tourism and IVF services was associated with an increased positive attitude towards the accompanying marketing activities ($r=0.3$, $p=0.04$).

DISCUSSION

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study in Cyprus to investigate the attitudes of specialists in the field towards IVF medical tourism services and the associated marketing activities. The findings of our study provide important information on the profile of the medical tourists, as perceived by the specialists, and their reasons for choosing Cyprus for IVF services, and on attitudes of the

Table 3. Bivariate analysis between demographic characteristics and attitudes towards medical tourism and *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) services and the marketing of these services.

| | Dependent variable: Positive attitude score towards medical tourism and IVF services | | | Dependent variable: Positive attitude score towards the marketing of medical tourism and IVF services | | |
|----------------------------|--|---------|---------|---|----------|---------|
| | Mean | SD | p value | Mean | SD | p value |
| <i>Gender</i> | | | 0.2* | | | 0.7* |
| Women | 3.9 | 0.3 | | 3.1 | 0.5 | |
| Men | 4.0 | 0.5 | | 3.2 | 0.3 | |
| <i>Type of workplace</i> | | | 0.9* | | | 0.4* |
| Public sector | 3.9 | 0.3 | | 3.0 | 0.5 | |
| Private sector | 3.9 | 0.4 | | 3.2 | 0.5 | |
| <i>Level of education</i> | | | 0.4* | | | 0.2* |
| University degree | 4.0 | 0.5 | | 3.3 | 0.5 | |
| Postgraduate studies/PhD | 3.9 | 0.3 | | 3.0 | 0.5 | |
| <i>Age</i> | | -0.01** | 0.9** | | -0.05** | 0.7** |
| <i>Years of experience</i> | | 0.22*** | 0.1*** | | -0.17*** | 0.1*** |

* Student's t test, ** Pearson's correlations coefficient, *** Spearman's correlations coefficient
SD: Standard deviation

Table 4. Attitudes of specialists towards the marketing of medical tourism and *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) services in Cyprus according to study questionnaire (each item rated 1–5).

| Item | Mean | SD | Median | Minimum value | Maximum value |
|---|------|-----|--------|---------------|---------------|
| Pricing policy in Cyprus on assisted IVF services is attractive | 3.4 | 0.9 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| There is cooperation between tourism companies and health centers providing assisted IVF services | 2.6 | 0.9 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Experts are informed about new market trends, new services and technologies related to assisted IVF services | 3.1 | 0.8 | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| There is a strategic planning for assisted IVF services in Cyprus | 2.5 | 0.8 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Assisted IVF services in Cyprus are constantly being developed | 3.6 | 0.6 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Specialized packages on assisted IVF services are offered in Cyprus | 2.9 | 0.9 | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| Marketing is non-specialized and not targeted | 3.5 | 0.9 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| The possibility of integrated marketing does not exist, due to the legislation preventing the development of prospects in this area | 3.3 | 0.9 | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| Health service providers must undertake marketing activities | 3.3 | 1.2 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| Marketing must be undertaken by an external partner/independent company | 3.8 | 0.8 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| Marketing should take place in the framework of public-private partnerships (such as the Ministry of Tourism and the Cyprus Tourism Organization) | 4.0 | 0.9 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Marketing should be part of the wider European growth programs | 4.0 | 0.8 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| Total score | 3.1 | 0.5 | 3.1 | 1.6 | 4.1 |

Higher values indicate higher agreement
SD: Standard deviation

specialists towards medical tourism and the IVF services medical tourism sector and the accompanying marketing activities.

Average or higher economic and social status, higher educational level, religious beliefs and young couples were the dominant characteristics of medical tourists seeking

IVF services in Cyprus cited by the specialists. Specialists in the private sector were more likely to agree that a medical tourist seeks IVF services in Cyprus regardless of socioeconomic status, age and level of education. The improvement in success rates and safety of IVF procedures, their low cost, the state-of-the-art technology, and the favorable climatic conditions, convenient geographical location and the prevailing political stability in Cyprus were reported as the most important reasons for medical tourists to choose Cyprus for IVF services. These findings are in agreement with similar studies^{6,8,10-12} since economic, religious, political and societal backgrounds may pose obstacles to the provision of related services in the countries of origin. Other advantages, such as modern medical technology, highly-skilled health professionals, high quality and personalized services, the country's climatic conditions, geographical location and political stability constitute important criteria for medical tourists to choose the destination country accordingly.¹³⁻¹⁶ Especially in the past, medical tourism was limited to high-income patients.²³ Religious beliefs also affect the patients' choice of the destination country, and some countries have become popular because of lower regulatory restrictions, especially for IVF.²⁴⁻²⁶

We found that the educational level, the work sector and the years of experience played an important role in the responses of the specialists. In particular, university graduates were more likely to agree that medical tourists are currently choosing Cyprus for IVF services due to a steady improvement in success rates and increased safety of the IVF procedures. They consider that the success rate, especially, is an important factor in the decision to choose the destination country rather than the home country.¹² Private sector specialists were also more likely to agree that medical tourists currently choose Cyprus for IVF services because of the low cost. Low cost is one of the most important factors found to influence patients' decision on the destination country for countries such as Turkey, Poland and Hungary, which become popular destinations due to significant cost advantage.^{9,27-29}

With regard to the attitudes of the specialists towards medical tourism and IVF medical tourism services and

the accompanying marketing activities, the study results showed a moderately positive trend, in accordance with the literature since specialists have in general a positive view of the potential impacts of medical tourism.³⁰

Our study has several limitations. Firstly, a small convenience sample was used due to the limited number of specialists in the field of medical tourism in Cyprus and the results cannot be generalized. In addition, we created a questionnaire to measure the attitudes of specialists towards IVF medical tourism services and marketing activities in Cyprus since an established valid questionnaire on these issues was not found in the literature. It is therefore not possible for this new instrument to measure with great precision and validity such a wide issue as attitudes. There is a need for further studies to test and possibly expand the questionnaire that we created. A cross-sectional study cannot establish causal relations but it was used to explore and measure the attitudes of the participants at a particular time with relatively low cost and effort. Finally, multivariate analyses were not conducted because of the very small sample size of the study population, and thus confounding is not eliminated, introducing systematic bias.

In conclusion, private and public healthcare providers in Cyprus should be accredited and certified in medical tourism and IVF medical tourism services.^{31,32} Specialist training programs should be established and implemented for policy and decision makers in order for them to become appropriately skilled.^{32,33} IVF medical tourism services in Cyprus can be significantly developed and government agencies such as the Cyprus Tourism Organization, and the Ministries of Health, Energy, Trade, Industry and Tourism, and should play a major role in that development, to enhance the economic sustainability of the sector and benefit from its growth. In order to capitalize on this, Cyprus should invest in the development of the IVF medical tourism services, offering personalized services, according to the specific characteristics of the medical tourists. As far as promotion and marketing activities are concerned, these should be part of a wider European development program, within the context of public-private cooperation.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Οι στάσεις των ειδικών αναφορικά με τον ιατρικό τουρισμό και τον τουρισμό σχετικά με την υποβοηθούμενη εξωσωματική γονιμοποίηση στην Κύπρο

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ΣΚΟΠΟΣ Η διερεύνηση των απόψεων και των στάσεων των Κυπρίων ειδικών στον ιατρικό τουρισμό αναφορικά με τον ιατρικό τουρισμό και τον τουρισμό υποβοηθούμενης εξωσωματικής γονιμοποίησης, καθώς και τις αντίστοιχες δραστηριότητες marketing. **ΥΛΙΚΟ-ΜΕΘΟΔΟΣ** Διεξήχθη μια συγχρονική μελέτη μεταξύ Μαρτίου και Ιουνίου 2018. Ο μελετώμενος πληθυσμός περιλάμβανε 50 ειδικούς στον ιατρικό τουρισμό, οι οποίοι συμπλήρωσαν ένα δομημένο ερωτηματολόγιο. Το ερωτηματολόγιο δημιουργήθηκε έπειτα από συστηματική βιβλιογραφική ανασκόπηση και μια ποιοτική μελέτη με 10 ειδικούς, πραγματοποιώντας ημιδομημένες συνεντεύξεις. Τα δημογραφικά χαρακτηριστικά των ειδικών ήταν οι ανεξάρτητες μεταβλητές. Οι εξαρτημένες μεταβλητές ήταν οι εξής: (α) Τα χαρακτηριστικά των ιατρικών τουριστών που αναζητούν υπηρεσίες υποβοηθούμενης εξωσωματικής γονιμοποίησης στην Κύπρο, (β) οι αιτίες επιλογής της Κύπρου για τη διενέργεια της υποβοηθούμενης εξωσωματικής γονιμοποίησης, (γ) οι στάσεις των ειδικών αναφορικά με τον ιατρικό τουρισμό και τον τουρισμό σχετικά με την υποβοηθούμενη εξωσωματική γονιμοποίηση και (δ) οι στάσεις των ειδικών αναφορικά με το marketing στον ιατρικό τουρισμό και τον τουρισμό σχετικά με την υποβοηθούμενη εξωσωματική γονιμοποίηση. **ΑΠΟΤΕΛΕΣΜΑΤΑ** Η μέση ηλικία των συμμετεχόντων ήταν τα 47,2 έτη, ενώ ο μέσος αριθμός ετών προϋπηρεσίας ήταν τα 13,2 έτη. Οι περισσότεροι συμμετέχοντες ήταν γυναίκες (62%), είχαν μεταπτυχιακό δίπλωμα (58%) και εργάζονταν στον ιδιωτικό τομέα (78%). Τα ιδιαίτερα κοινωνικά, δημογραφικά, οικονομικά χαρακτηριστικά των ιατρικών τουριστών που αναζητούν υπηρεσίες υποβοηθούμενης εξωσωματικής γονιμοποίησης στην Κύπρο ήταν τα εξής: Ζευγάρια μέσου ή ανώτερου οικονομικού και κοινωνικού επιπέδου, ζευγάρια ανώτερου μορφωτικού επιπέδου, θρησκευτικοί λόγοι και νεαρά ζευγάρια. Οι σημαντικότεροι λόγοι για τους οποίους οι ιατρικοί τουρίστες επιλέγουν την Κύπρο για υπηρεσίες υποβοηθούμενης εξωσωματικής γονιμοποίησης ήταν οι εξής: Η διαρκής βελτίωση των ποσοστών επιτυχίας και ασφάλειας, το χαμηλό κόστος, η προσφορά υπηρεσιών υψηλής επιστημονικής γνώσης, το κλίμα, η γεωγραφική θέση και η πολιτική σταθερότητα. Η αυξημένη θετική στάση απέναντι στον ιατρικό τουρισμό και στον τουρισμό σχετικά με την υποβοηθούμενη εξωσωματική γονιμοποίηση σχετιζόταν με αυξημένη θετική στάση και απέναντι στις αντίστοιχες υπηρεσίες marketing. **ΣΥΜΠΕΡΑΣΜΑΤΑ** Οι πάροχοι υπηρεσιών ιατρικού τουρισμού στην Κύπρο πρέπει να λάβουν και την αντίστοιχη πιστοποίηση στις εν λόγω υπηρεσίες, ενώ είναι απαραίτητο να αναπτυχθούν και τα κατάλληλα εκπαιδευτικά προγράμματα. Η Κύπρος πρέπει να επενδύσει στην ανάπτυξη των υπηρεσιών υποβοηθούμενης εξωσωματικής γονιμοποίησης, προσφέροντας παράλληλα εξατομικευμένες υπηρεσίες σύμφωνα με τα ιδιαίτερα χαρακτηριστικά των ιατρικών τουριστών.

Λέξεις ευρητηρίου: Ιατρικός τουρισμός, Κύπρος, Στάσεις, Τουρισμός υποβοηθούμενης εξωσωματικής γονιμοποίησης

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