

The search for medical technologies abroad

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The search for medical technologies through 'medical travel' can change the lives of patients and their family members, according to medical anthropologists Cecilia Vindrola-Padros and Linda M. Whiteford, who examined the lives of Bolivian and Paraguayan families who traveled to Buenos Aires, Argentina, seeking pediatric oncology care for their children. In a study published in the current issue of [*Technology and Innovation – Proceedings of the National Academy of Inventors*](#), Vindrola-Padros and Whiteford, who are both at the University of South Florida, examined the diverse and complex causes that lead to medical travel in quest of new and better medical technologies, and also analyzed the role of the host country.

"Rather than focus on issues of equality of access, many academic discussions related to technology focus on technology [innovation](#) and adaptation to suit the needs of users," said Vindrola-Padros.

In their study, she and Whiteford accessed the medical travelers' reasons for seeking the technologies, analyzed the impact on the families, and reviewed the [health care](#) policies of the host nation.

According to Vindrola-Padros, the migration and health care policies of the host country play a significant role.

"The host country's resources available for medically traveling families also determine the ease with which families can settle and adapt," she explained.

Vindrola-Padros and Whiteford noted that a new Argentinian government initiative called "Medicina Argentina," along with a reduction in the prices of medical procedures in Argentina, are driving an increase in medical travelers to that nation. In addition, Argentina has permissive immigration and health policies under a model of universal health care in which public health care is not viewed in terms of financial gain or citizenship but, said Vindrola-Padros, as a universal human right.

"In 2009 Argentina received between 6,000 and 8,000 foreign patients," said Vindrola-Padros. "The government is aiming to raise that number to 100,000."

Vindrola-Padros, who collected and reviewed narrative accounts of [family members](#) who left home to seek medical technologies in [Argentina](#), found that medical travel can be a strategy to overcome barriers to access to both health care and the advanced technologies that might not be available at home.

She uses the term 'medical travel' rather than 'medical tourism' for a good reason.

"Medical travel is often a strategy used by economically challenged patients who see travel as the only way to save their lives," concluded Vindrola-Padros. "The term 'medical tourism' suggests stereotyped images of wealthy patients traveling abroad for elective procedures rather than for life-or-death treatments."

Yet, the medical travel strategy carries with it drawbacks and challenges, reported Vindrola-Padros and Whiteford. Medical traveling families must disrupt a child's schooling, there is uncertainty involved with relocation, and the children often worry about the effect their disease has on their family. Parents often need to seek employment and children

need to continue their schooling.

"Medical technological innovations change and save lives, but they are not always accessible to everyone," concluded Vindrola-Padros.

"Medical travel aimed at seeking medical technologies and treatment is a complex experience with complex and diverse causes. We can only imagine the full consequences of medical travel and how they may play out in the lives and futures of surviving medically traveling children."

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