

Every year the cost of health care in the United States increases. Of course inflation is one reason, but typically the cost of health care has increased two to three times the rate of inflation. On top of this, more and more people in the U.S. are uninsured. The combination of these two factors makes receiving some health care services out of reach for many people.

For some, the world's free market has come to the rescue. The U.S. has one of the highest costs of living in the world. As a result, highly trained professionals, like doctors, demand a high wage. Costs are also high, because of the cost of health care administration. A recent report estimated that approximately 1/3 of the cost of health care in the U.S. is due to the massive cost of administration and paperwork.

This has opened up opportunities for equally well trained doctors in countries that have a much lower cost of living to provide the same health care services at a much lower fee without the cumbersome and expensive administrative costs.

This phenomenon is commonly known as medical tourism. Countries such as Mexico, Thailand and India are some of the most popular destinations. In these countries, often American educated doctors perform surgeries such as angioplasty, spinal surgery and hip replacements.. They perform these services at a fraction of the cost of the same services performed in the U.S.

For example an angioplasty in the U.S. might cost \$45,000 whereas the same procedure in Thailand might cost just over \$8,000. Surgery for a herniated spinal disc might cost \$38,000 in the U.S. but only \$8,000 in Mexico. A hip replacement in America can cost over \$40,000 but in India it can cost as little as \$6,500.

Some might worry that the quality of care would be lower and the risks higher; however, at reputable hospitals, the quality is often higher and complication rates are surprisingly low.

Until now, most medical tourists have been the uninsured who have had to pay for their entire care out of pocket. A recent trend, however, is for insurance companies to begin looking at overseas health care as a viable option for their insured. These avant-garde programs are beginning to offer options of full coverage for certain procedures performed overseas verses only partial coverage for the same procedures performed in the U.S.

We are increasingly living in a world economy. This has led to many manufacturing jobs being performed in countries with lower employment costs. The same is beginning to happen in industries that require higher education as well, including health care.