

Highlights

- A co-word analysis was applied to elucidate the thematic evolution of medical tourism (MT) research from 1931 to 2016.
- Research on medical tourism has broadened its focus since 1987.
- Topics such as assisted reproduction and fertility tourism will be of interest for MT research in a near future.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the evolution of medical tourism (MT) research from a longitudinal perspective (period 1931–2016). A co-word analysis was applied to themes found in published research listed in the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus database services.

The results reveal six clusters of themes: a) issues regarding ethical implications, trust and accreditation; b) health, wellness, spa tourism and service quality; c) health-related issues, medical treatments and tourism; d) “sensitive” practices in MT; e) medical tourism destinations and marketing; and f) globalization, policies and the effect on international patients. This study is one of the first attempts to use a bibliometric approach and co-word analysis so as to offer powerful insight into the conceptual structure of MT research from academic literature and to visualize all the underlying and interconnected subfields. It also provides a guide to researchers by improving the understanding of the current state of the art and predicting the direction of future research.

Keywords

Bibliometric analysis, Co-word analysis, Thematic evolution, Medical tourism, Health tourism