

The Strategic Role of The HealthTürkiye Portal and Brand in Türkiye's International Health Tourism: An Examination from the Perspective of Legislation and Practice

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Abstract

Developed within the scope of Türkiye's health tourism vision, the HealthTürkiye brand and portal have been positioned as a one-stop digital platform for international patients. This study examines the strategic role of the HealthTürkiye portal and brand in light of the Regulation on International Health Tourism and Tourist Health dated April 26, 2025, and related documents. The legislative analysis reveals that innovations such as mandatory membership of healthcare facilities and intermediary institutions to the HealthTürkiye portal and performance monitoring criteria ensure compliance with international quality standards and digital integration. The components of the HealthTürkiye brand make significant contributions in the areas of digitalization, service quality, patient experience, and global brand image. In practice, the membership process and performance criteria of the portal have triggered a process of institutional alignment and transformation for healthcare facilities and intermediary institutions. The model centered on the HealthTürkiye portal is evaluated in terms of the advantages it provides in transparency, supervision, and promotion, as well as the challenges it presents regarding data sharing and adaptation. As a result, the HealthTürkiye brand serves as Türkiye's gateway to the world and assumes a strategic role in the international healthcare system. The study offers recommendations for policymakers to ensure the portal's sustainability and data security, and for healthcare facilities and intermediary institutions to invest in digital infrastructure and service quality.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, health tourism has gained increasing momentum globally (Lee & Spisto, 2007:1), and the economic returns offered by this sector have encouraged many countries to become health tourism destinations (Wong et al., 2014:1). Today, the appeal of health tourism is shaped not only by cost advantages but also by multidimensional factors such as quality, speed, and cultural proximity (Jagyasi, 2010:9). In recent years, Türkiye has become a significant global actor in the field of health tourism (Tengilimoğlu, 2021:1). According to data from TURKSTAT, health tourism revenues amounted to approximately 3 billion USD in both 2023 and 2024, and reached 2.18 billion USD in the first nine months of 2025 (TURKSTAT, 2025; USHAŞ, 2025). Nearly 1.5 million foreign patients choose Türkiye for treatment annually (TURKSTAT, 2025); factors such as a robust health infrastructure equipped with advanced technology, qualified healthcare professionals, and affordable and rapid service delivery make Türkiye an attractive option (Bulut & Şengül, 2019:45; Tontuş, 2015). With its high-quality healthcare services and geographical advantages, Türkiye stands out in this field, increasing its competitive power in the global market through digitalization and branding policies supported by the government (Mumcu & Çapar, 2023:281). Countries such as Malaysia, India, Singapore and Thailand are actively competing in the international patient market through digital health portals and national health brands (Wong et al., 2014).

To further develop this potential and centralize international promotion efforts, a new umbrella brand and digital portal named “HealthTürkiye” was launched in 2022. Promoted with the slogan “Heart of Health,” the HealthTürkiye brand aims to introduce international healthcare services to the world and position Türkiye as a central country in health tourism (Anadolu Agency, 2022).

In recent years, strategic coherence has been achieved in the governance of health tourism policies in Türkiye; goals to increase the global competitiveness of healthcare services have been explicitly reflected in national plans and strategies. The Ministry of Health’s 2019–2023 Strategic Plan identified “increasing the preference of our country in the field of international health tourism” as one of its main strategic objectives (Ministry of Health, 2022). In line with this objective, the International Health Services Joint Stock Company (USHAŞ) was established in 2019 as an affiliate of the Ministry of Health to promote Türkiye’s healthcare system internationally and to support and organize health tourism activities (USHAŞ, 2025). In the new period, this approach has been further institutionalized with the 12th Development Plan (2024–2028) and the Ministry of Health’s 2024–2028 Strategic Plan. These plans aim to

improve the service capacity of health tourism in both qualitative and quantitative terms, strengthen the inspection system for certified healthcare facilities and intermediary institutions, encourage the accreditation of healthcare facilities, promote expansion into high value-added areas, and establish infrastructure for remote monitoring of health tourism beneficiaries. Additionally, to enhance Türkiye's global promotional power in health tourism, the HealthTürkiye brand is planned to be positioned as an international umbrella brand, and promotional and marketing activities will be carried out accordingly (Ministry of Health, 2024). These strategic orientations demonstrate that the vision of health tourism is not merely viewed as an economic revenue stream but also as a holistic brand management process that enhances the country's international reputation.

The most tangible product of the HealthTürkiye initiative is the official digital platform "www.healthturkiye.com," which presents Türkiye's health tourism opportunities to the world with multilingual content (Anadolu Agency, 2022; HealthTürkiye, 2025). Through the portal, diagnostic, treatment, and rehabilitation services across Türkiye are promoted in multiple languages; patients can plan their entire process, from flight arrangements to choosing hospitals and doctors, and compare costs via the "Plan Your Treatment" section (Anadolu Agency, 2022). Integrated with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's GoTürkiye application (GoTürkiye, 2025), the portal offers access to a 24/7 international patient call center available in six languages: Arabic, Russian, English, French, Persian, and German (USHAŞ, 2025; HealthTürkiye, 2025). Additionally, the portal includes satisfaction surveys to measure international patients' post-treatment experiences (Anadolu Agency, 2022; HealthTürkiye, 2025). In this way, HealthTürkiye aims to establish a reliable digital ecosystem where foreign patients can comprehensively plan and monitor their healthcare journey in Türkiye.

The HealthTürkiye brand is not merely a promotional initiative, but a comprehensive strategic program supported by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Türkiye and operated by its affiliated public company, USHAŞ (USHAŞ, 2025). Positioned as the sole official representative of Türkiye's international health system, this brand has been the subject of limited academic studies. Koç (2025) considers HealthTürkiye a case study that contributes to Türkiye's nation brand value in the health sector and effectively utilizes information systems, emphasizing that it helps position Türkiye as a reliable health tourism destination with its digitalized and efficient service approach. Various studies emphasize that public policies aimed at developing health tourism and investments based on public-private partnerships strengthen the country's competitive advantage and provide significant contributions to the economy (Pourkhaghan et al., 2013:133; Doğan & Aslan, 2019:391). However, there is a noticeable lack

of studies examining how the HealthTürkiye portal has evolved beyond being a mere promotional tool into a regulatory digital governance, performance monitoring, and quality assurance mechanism for healthcare facilities and intermediary institutions authorized in international health tourism.

In the current literature, the HealthTürkiye brand is mostly discussed in terms of nation branding, promotional strategies, and digital communication; there is no comprehensive analysis regarding the portal's legal framework, mandatory membership structure, performance criteria, and digital governance functions. With the new "Regulation on International Health Tourism and Tourist Health," which came into force on April 26, 2025, the HealthTürkiye portal has transformed from a promotional platform into a mandatory and performance-based monitoring mechanism for authorized healthcare facilities and intermediary institutions. There is currently no academic study that examines this significant shift within the integrity of legislation and practice. This research aims to fill that gap and is the first study to analyze the HealthTürkiye model within a holistic framework in the context of digital governance, quality assurance, performance monitoring, and institutional compliance processes.

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the position and importance of the HealthTürkiye portal and brand in Türkiye's international healthcare system in terms of legislation and implementation. In this context, the regulations introduced within the framework of the new regulation dated April 26, 2025, the portal membership process, and the performance monitoring mechanism will be examined; and the contributions of the HealthTürkiye brand in the fields of digitalization, quality standards, patient experience, and international promotion will be analyzed. Furthermore, the adaptation process of healthcare institutions to this new order and the effects of the digital transition will be discussed; a comparative perspective with previous regulations will be provided, and strengths and weaknesses will be debated. In the final section, recommendations will be presented to policymakers and practitioners in light of the findings.

2. Methodology

This research is a review study based on a qualitative document analysis approach. The scope of the study comprises current legislation, institutional documents, and academic literature related to international health tourism in Türkiye. As the primary source, the "Regulation on International Health Tourism and Tourist Health," which was published in the Official Gazette and entered into force on April 26, 2025, along with its annexes, has been examined. These legislative documents have been analyzed in terms of revealing the legal basis of the

HealthTürkiye portal, as well as its membership and supervision conditions. Documents were selected using purposive sampling based on relevance, with keywords such as “HealthTürkiye,” “international health tourism,” and “portal,” limited to the period 2022–2025. The sources include national policy texts, Ministry of Health strategy documents, USHAŞ publications, and reliable news agencies. The unit of analysis consisted of thematic sections within these documents that directly address the legal, institutional, and operational aspects of the HealthTürkiye portal. Themes were inductively derived through descriptive thematic analysis, grouping codes under categories such as “legal framework,” “membership process,” and “performance monitoring.” Within the scope of the literature review, recent studies on HealthTürkiye and health tourism were examined. In addition, data on the components and promotional strategies of the HealthTürkiye portal were gathered through institutional publications and the official website of USHAŞ, as well as reliable news sources such as Anadolu Agency. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques; the provisions of the legislation and implementation data were interpreted to provide a comprehensive evaluation in line with the aim of the study.

3. Findings

The HealthTürkiye Portal and Membership Process Within the Scope of Legislation

The regulation dated April 26, 2025, made membership in the HealthTürkiye portal mandatory for all healthcare facilities and intermediary institutions operating in the field of international health tourism (Official Gazette, 2025). According to the regulation, institutions wishing to operate with an international health tourism authorization certificate must submit a document proving their application for membership in the HealthTürkiye portal along with other application documents (Caner, 2025a: 1039). This provision demonstrates that integration into the portal begins at the initial stage and that the digital platform is an inseparable part of the authorization process. Indeed, the relevant article of the regulation states, “Healthcare facilities and intermediary institutions are required to become members of the Portal and to enter data completely, accurately, and up-to-date,” thereby making active participation in the portal a legal obligation for all authorized institutions. As a transition measure, institutions that obtained their authorization before the regulation’s effective date were granted a six-month adaptation period. It was announced that institutions failing to register by October 26, 2025, would have their certificates revoked. This warning highlights the critical importance of portal membership and the close monitoring of the compliance process.

The obligation to register on the portal is not limited to a one-time process but entails a continuous data submission and monitoring mechanism (Caner, 2025b). According to the

regulation, all data related to services provided under health tourism must be regularly entered into the portal, updated, and transferred to the central health data system as determined by the Ministry (Official Gazette, 2025). Thus, the portal serves as a central database collecting a wide range of information about foreign patients, including diagnosis/treatment, billing, discharge, and even remote health services. Through this data declaration and notification system, health tourism activities can be monitored transparently, allowing the public authority to conduct real-time audits and develop policies.

Performance Criteria and Evaluation System

Another innovation introduced by the new regulation is the implementation of performance criteria and an evaluation system. Healthcare facilities and intermediary institutions will be evaluated at least once a year by USHAŞ based on five main performance criteria defined in Annex-2 of the regulation (Regulation on International Health Tourism and Tourist Health, Article 9 and Annex-2). These criteria and their target values are summarized as follows:

Table 1. Performance Criteria for Authorized Institutions in International Health Tourism

Criterion	Measurement Method	Sufficient Performance	Partially Sufficient Performance	Insufficient Performance	Purpose
Patient Satisfaction	Centrally conducted surveys by USHAŞ; institutions must analyze results twice a year	≥ 85% satisfaction	75%–85% satisfaction	< 75% satisfaction	Monitor patient experience and improve service quality
Response Time to Requests	Average annual rate of responses within 48 hours via portal or call center	≥ 90% response rate	80%–90% response rate	< 80% response rate	Ensure rapid handling of patient requests
Appointment Waiting Time	Ratio of patients receiving appointments within one month	> 90% of patients	80%–90% of patients	< 80% of patients	Reduce wait times and ensure timely access to care
Complaint Rate	Ratio of complaints received via portal/call center to total patient volume	< 3% complaint rate	3%–5% complaint rate	> 5% complaint rate	Identify dissatisfaction trends and improve accountability
Financial Performance	Annual change in health tourism revenue	≥ 20% increase	1%–20% increase	No increase or decrease	Promote sustainability and growth in the sector

Criterion	Measurement Method	Sufficient Performance	Partially Sufficient Performance	Insufficient Performance	Purpose
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Note. Created by the author based on the *Regulation on International Health Tourism and Tourist Health* (Article 9 and Annex-2).

This table presents the performance evaluation criteria applied to healthcare institutions and intermediary agencies authorized in international health tourism. Each criterion includes clearly defined thresholds for sufficient, partially sufficient, and insufficient performance, forming the basis for USHAŞ’s annual institutional audits. The evaluation aims to ensure service quality, responsiveness, and sectoral sustainability in alignment with national health tourism policy goals.

USHAŞ will rate institutions as “sufficient,” “partially sufficient,” or “insufficient” based on each criterion and will notify relevant parties of the overall performance evaluation via the portal. Institutions found insufficient in any criterion or partially sufficient in several areas will be subject to a follow-up assessment after three months; if no improvement is observed, their authorization certificate may be temporarily suspended. For example, a facility rated “insufficient” will be re-evaluated three months after the initial finding; if no progress is made, the certificate will be suspended for six months. If sufficient performance is not achieved in the second review either, the certificate will be revoked. These sanctions demonstrate the binding nature and seriousness of the performance criteria continuously monitored through the portal. In summary, the new regulation mandates portal membership and data reporting while also transforming the HealthTürkiye portal into a tool for oversight and feedback. All authorized institutions are monitored in real time by the Ministry and USHAŞ through the portal; service quality and patient satisfaction are measured with concrete data to ensure international standards are maintained.

Functional Components and Contributions of the HealthTürkiye Brand

The HealthTürkiye brand brings together a range of functional components to enhance service delivery for international patients and increase Türkiye’s institutional visibility in health tourism (USHAŞ, 2025). These components both improve the experience of foreign patients and ensure that healthcare institutions align around specific standards. The main components and functions of the HealthTürkiye brand can be summarized as follows:

- **HealthTürkiye Web Portal:** This is the official digital gateway to Türkiye’s international health system. It brings together international patients and authorized healthcare providers in Türkiye on a single platform, enabling patients to plan their healthcare journey with an end-to-end tracking system. Patients can view and compare treatment offers from various providers, select the most suitable treatment program online, and book appointments at the best price by checking costs (USHAŞ, 2025). The portal thus serves as a one-stop service point for health tourists. As an official platform established with the support of the Ministry and USHAŞ, it provides a reliable source of information for international patients (USHAŞ, 2025).
- **International Patient Call Center:** Operating under HealthTürkiye, the call center provides services 24/7 in six languages (English, Arabic, Russian, French, Persian, German) (USHAŞ, 2025). This center, accessible at all times for patients seeking treatment abroad, directs inquiries to appropriate healthcare providers, offers information, and provides interpretation support when needed. The call center is integrated with portal operations; in addition to answering questions, it collects complaints and feedback, which are recorded in the system. These insights are shared with relevant institutions and authorities, allowing for comprehensive evaluation of service quality (USHAŞ, 2025). The HealthTürkiye web portal is a one-stop

digital point where patients can select hospitals and treatments, calculate costs, and manage the entire process, including accommodation and transfers (Koç, 2025:225). It is supported by a multilingual 24/7 call center and a patient satisfaction system.

- **Patient Satisfaction Surveys:** At the core of the HealthTürkiye brand is the experience of foreign patients choosing Türkiye. In this context, a standardized satisfaction survey is provided to international patients after their treatment process is completed. The results are carefully analyzed, and each comment and feedback is taken seriously. The data is regularly reported to healthcare institutions to identify areas for improvement, while general trends are evaluated by USHAŞ on a sectoral basis. This survey system is integrated with the patient satisfaction criterion in Annex-2 and is one of the key components of quality assurance. Monitoring patient expectations and satisfaction closely highlights the value given to foreign patients as “guests” and differentiates Türkiye’s service approach.
- **USHAŞ Academy:** One of the long-term strategies of the HealthTürkiye brand is to develop human resources within the health tourism ecosystem. USHAŞ Academy, established under USHAŞ, aims to be Türkiye’s academic face with international healthcare training programs. Through the academy, health professionals from various countries are introduced to Türkiye’s modern healthcare infrastructure and experts; tailored training programs are organized for foreign healthcare personnel (USHAŞ, 2025). This initiative allows Türkiye to share its experience and expertise globally while enhancing the international recognition and reputation of the HealthTürkiye brand. USHAŞ Academy also contributes to the training of health tourism professionals, indirectly improving service quality across the sector.
- **International Promotion and Cooperation Activities:** Under the HealthTürkiye brand, USHAŞ carries out various promotional and networking activities both domestically and abroad. International health business forums are organized to bring together health tourism stakeholders and foster new partnerships. For instance, USHAŞ has held health business forums with countries such as Uzbekistan, the United Kingdom, Azerbaijan, and Pakistan (USHAŞ, 2025). Moreover, participation in international fairs and congresses promotes Türkiye’s healthcare capacity and the HealthTürkiye portal. Thanks to promotional campaigns coordinated with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the HealthTürkiye brand has become a symbol of Türkiye’s national branding efforts in health tourism. Indeed, the initiative is presented as an example of “creating a national brand value in health” among the public diplomacy efforts coordinated by the Directorate of Communications (Koç, 2025:225). Koç’s (2025) study emphasizes that the digital and integrated structure of the HealthTürkiye platform showcases Türkiye’s healthcare capacity globally and contributes to the country’s image by presenting modern health services under one roof.

The components outlined above show that the HealthTürkiye brand has a multidimensional structure. While the portal and call center focus on direct patient communication and experience, the survey system offers a feedback and quality improvement mechanism; USHAŞ Academy contributes to human resource development, and international activities serve national promotion. When evaluated together, it is clear that HealthTürkiye is not merely a website, but a comprehensive strategic program aimed at strengthening Türkiye’s international healthcare system. This program facilitates service delivery through digital technologies, while also raising standards and enhancing competitiveness through global marketing. In the next section, the effects of the HealthTürkiye initiative will be discussed in light of these findings; the new regulation will be compared with the previous framework, and strengths and weaknesses will be evaluated

4. Discussion

HealthTürkiye is a state supported digital branding model in health tourism. Türkiye is among the first countries to institutionalize such a model. This model both facilitates the patient experience and offers service providing facilities an objective supervision mechanism.

It was previously asserted that a health tourism portal would play a key role in Türkiye's branding and international outreach in this sector (Çolakoğlu & Caner, 2021:23). Today, the HealthTürkiye portal is actively used, and portal registration has been made mandatory. Obligations such as regulatory compliance, data reporting and performance measurement reflect the application of digital public administration principles in the health sector. Nevertheless, especially for private health facilities having only 6 months to adapt the portal may give rise to technical and administrative difficulties in practice.

The HealthTürkiye portal and brand represent a concrete manifestation of Türkiye's strategy to unify its health tourism sector under a single umbrella and digital transformation strategy. The findings show that the new regulation and portal application work in an integrated way, bringing various advantages to Türkiye's international health system. Yet this transformation also brings certain challenges and topics for discussion. This section examines the strengths and potential problems of the HealthTürkiye initiative in a comparative view.

Evaluation in terms of Digitalisation and Transparency

The mandatory nature of the HealthTürkiye portal and its role as a central database have strengthened digitalisation and transparency in the health tourism sector. The digital infrastructure based on the portal has made operations at health facilities measurable and auditable (Caner, 2025b). While the earlier regulation of 13 July 2017 also envisaged that health tourism patients' records would be entered into the Ministry's web based system, it remained general and an effective monitoring system could not be formed in practice. The 2025 regulation, however, has detailed the data reporting processes, explicitly obliging periodic reporting of data such as patient numbers, revenues, country information, etc. (Official Gazette, 2017; Official Gazette, 2025).

Moreover, through annual inspections and integration with the HealthTürkiye portal, real time reporting of all data has enabled tighter oversight of the sector, which constitutes a significant step toward the legislative principles of transparency and accountability.

Caner (2025b) details the functions of units within health facilities under the updated regulation. A responsible staff member is assigned for each international patient and this information is recorded in the HealthTürkiye portal. This digital integration represents an important innovation in data accuracy, traceability and transparency. Portal based monitoring has allowed for the establishment, for the first

time in Türkiye's health tourism sector, of a performance based evaluation system grounded in real data. Since indicators such as patient satisfaction, waiting times, complaints and financial performance are tracked with concrete metrics, a quality based competition among service providers is expected. Koç (2025) notes that the adoption of information and communication technologies raises national brand value, and that HealthTürkiye strengthens Türkiye's global position in health by emphasising digitalised and efficient services. This finding suggests that the portal centred model positively reflects on the country's image. Indeed, the fact that international patients can access quality services via an official digital platform and know that the process will be monitored can make Türkiye a trustworthy health destination.

Impact on Quality Standards and Patient Experience Another strength of the HealthTürkiye initiative lies in its effect on raising service quality standards and improving the patient experience. The new regulation mandates that healthcare facilities obtain accreditation from TÜSKA (Türkiye Institute for Quality and Accreditation in Healthcare) or certification from the Ministry of Health, thereby reinforcing certification standards. According to Article 6(b) of the Regulation, hospitals, medical centers, clinical laboratories, and dialysis centers must be accredited by TÜSKA, while other healthcare facilities are required to obtain certification issued by the Ministry. Pursuant to Provisional Article 1(3), existing healthcare institutions are obliged to fulfill this requirement by December 31, 2026 (Official Gazette, 2025). It also requires that in each authorized health facility there be personnel who speak a foreign language, interpretation services provided, and at least one active foreign language website. Whereas the 2017 regulation required employment of two foreign language speaking staff, the 2025 regulation institutionalises multilingual communication infrastructure (Official Gazette, 2017; Official Gazette, 2025). This change not only allows foreign patients to receive services without a language barrier, but also encourages institutions to adopt a more professional approach to international patient communication.

Several internationally recognized accreditation programs are widely used around the world, such as Joint Commission International (JCI), Accreditation Canada (Qmentum Global™), the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards International (ACHSI), QHA Trent, and TEMOS International among others. These organizations have developed comprehensive sets of standards and audit mechanisms covering areas such as patient safety, clinical quality, governance processes, risk management, and patient experience (Güdük and Kılıç, 2017: 103; Caner, 2025d). However, the Regulation on International Health Tourism and Tourist Health stipulates that hospitals, medical centers, laboratories, and dialysis centers must be accredited by TÜSKA, while other healthcare facilities are required to obtain a certificate issued by the Ministry of Health. Furthermore, all healthcare institutions are obligated to publish their accreditation or certification on their official

websites (Official Gazette, 2025, Articles 6 and 13).

The mandatory nature of patient satisfaction surveys and complaint tracking via the portal reflect a management approach that places the patient experience at the centre. Feedback is received and evaluated from each foreign patient, allowing for deficiencies in service processes to be identified and remedial action taken. For example, if survey results show dissatisfaction at a given hospital among foreign patients, this will be monitored by USHAŞ and the Ministry and the institution will receive the necessary warning. This mechanism places health services providers in a continuous improvement loop, creating a quality focused competitive environment. The regulation provides that institutions with low satisfaction or high complaint rates will first be warned and if no improvement occurs, their activities may be temporarily suspended. This sanctioning power ensures that quality standards do not remain only on paper but are implemented in daily practice.

The integration of the HealthTürkiye portal and call centre also enhances the patient experience holistically. Patients who need real time support while using the portal can reach the 24/7 call centre and receive professional guidance at every stage before or after treatment (USHAŞ, 2025). This is a critical support mechanism that alleviates the uncertainty and concerns an international patient might face when obtaining health services in a foreign country. The combined delivery of healthcare services and communication/consultation services is a factor that increases patient satisfaction. Moreover, the portal's provision of price comparison options and transparent display of treatment packages can increase price and service transparency across the sector (Anadolu Ajansı, 2022). For patients, this is an innovation that prevents unexpected cost surprises and supports informed decision making.

International Promotion and Competitiveness

A further strategic benefit of the HealthTürkiye brand is that it increases Türkiye's international visibility and competitiveness by unifying its promotion under a single brand. Previously, hospitals and intermediary agencies in Türkiye attempted marketing and partnerships abroad individually, which could result in a fragmented image and differences in standards. Now, under a single umbrella brand supported by the Ministry of Health, all stakeholders reach the world with a consistent message. It has been decided that all advertising and promotional activities will include the HealthTürkiye brand (Anadolu Ajansı, 2022), thus Türkiye's health tourism capacity is represented globally with a coherent identity.

This approach is similar to the use of the "GoTürkiye" brand in tourism by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Anadolu Ajansı, 2022; GoTürkiye, 2025). The integration of the HealthTürkiye portal with GoTürkiye indicates that health tourism is included within the country's general tourism promotion strategy. When compared with competing destinations, Türkiye's model exhibits both similarities and radical structural differences. For instance, Malaysia and Singapore have successfully

utilized national agencies like the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) and "Singapore Medicine" to create strong regional brands; however, these models often rely on voluntary participation and public-private partnerships for promotion (Wong et al., 2014). In contrast, Türkiye's model via HealthTürkiye is quite comprehensive and distinct by its mandatory participation. In a sense, it is a model led by public authority. Koç (2025), evaluating the HealthTürkiye initiative within the framework of national brand building, points out that the platform has brought Türkiye's health service quality and capacity to a global showcase, emphasising modern facilities, expert doctors, cost effective treatments, and advanced technologies. Indeed, when one examines the HealthTürkiye portal, it is clear that profiles of reputable hospitals, clinics, and intermediary institutions in Türkiye are presented together as a strong showcase. This is important for gaining the trust of international patients and reducing marketing costs.

The Republic of Türkiye officially references the institutions listed in the HealthTürkiye portal when delivering health services to foreign patients worldwide. This enhances the perceived trustworthiness of the registered institutions and provides a facilitating framework for visa, travel and treatment processes.

However, when considering branding, an issue worthy of attention is the portal's sustainable currency and user friendliness. Digital platforms can fail to achieve the intended effect if user experience is weak or information is not kept up to date. Hence, it is clear that the HealthTürkiye portal needs continuous maintenance and updates. Content must be presented clearly, the data of hospitals must be regularly renewed, and interface improvements should be made in line with user feedback. Also, for success in international competition, the privileges offered via the portal (for example health visa facilitation, travel and accommodation arrangements) must be implemented effectively. When a foreign patient chooses HealthTürkiye, they must truly receive guidance in visa processes, and flight and transfer arrangements must be handled seamlessly so that trust in the brand increases.

Institutional Compliance and Effects of Digital Transition

The HealthTürkiye portal and the new regulation have placed significant institutional transformation pressure on health organisations. All health facilities holding authorisation certificates hospitals, medical centres, outpatient clinics, practices as well as intermediary agencies are required to align their operations with the new rules. In this context, preparation has been made for technical infrastructure for portal membership and data entry, integration of information management systems with the Ministry's systems, etc. Large scale hospitals with high international patient traffic may adapt more easily, while smaller institutions with fewer foreign patients or limited infrastructure may find the adaptation process challenging. Especially intermediary agencies may encounter difficulties initially with building call centre infrastructure or instant data reporting requirements. The regulation

offers some flexibility by requiring agencies without their own call centre to provide a contracting arrangement; however in any case a degree of investment and restructuring is necessary.

Caner (2025c: 455) emphasises the regulatory and supervisory role of Provincial Health Directorates in health tourism. These directorates oversee the conduct of international health tourism activities in compliance with the legislation, verify that an international health tourism unit exists in the facility with staff competent in foreign languages, check notifications via the EKİP system, ensure assignment of a responsible personnel to each patient, and verify that all information is completely recorded in the HealthTürkiye portal. This structure is said to increase service quality and process traceability.

Another dimension of the institutional compliance process is the sanctions for non compliance. The regulation provides for severe consequences up to revocation of authorisation for institutions not registering to the portal or continuously low performing in performance criteria. This has pushed health facilities to take serious steps to comply with the new system. Many hospitals restructured their foreign patient units in the second half of 2025, appointed coordinators fluent in foreign languages, and assigned staff responsible for data entry to the HealthTürkiye portal. Although this transformation increases operational burden and cost in the short term, it can be regarded as an investment yielding efficiency and quality gains in the medium to long term. Indeed, regular analysis of survey and call centre data allows institutions to identify their weaknesses and take corrective action. Also, institutions gaining global visibility via the portal may directly attract foreign patients and obtain marketing benefits. From this perspective, institutions adapting to the digital transition may gain competitive advantage.

The new regulation's provisions have also generated debate. Particularly the Turkish Medical Association (TTB) has challenged certain articles of the regulation, filing for suspension and annulment. One point of objection is the limitation on treatment of patients based on citizenship status: the regulation stipulates that only institutions with international health tourism authorisation certificates may accept foreign patients, which TTB argues restricts physicians' professional activity based on the patient's nationality. TTB (2025) also criticizes the requirement to transfer sensitive health data of foreign patients to the central system without anonymisation, saying this contradicts the Law on the Protection of Personal Data No. 6698, which mandates that data processing must be purpose linked, limited, and proportionate. These critiques point to practical areas of caution in the HealthTürkiye portal model. Data security and patient confidentiality are among the most critical matters that come with digitalisation. Therefore, the portal's technical infrastructure must be supported by cybersecurity measures, access restrictions implemented such that only necessary persons view data, and international standards adhered to regarding patient consent and prohibition of sharing personal identity data beyond anonymised aggregations.

Türkiye's vision of becoming a global health tourism hub via the HealthTürkiye brand must be supported not only by service quality but also by a qualified human resource base. The study by Çalışkan, Sevim & Tuncer (2024: 267) highlights that in this context secondary education level health tourism training remains largely limited to elective courses, indicating deficiencies in the education domain. As stated in the 12th Development Plan, the sustainability of the HealthTürkiye brand will be possible only with early guidance in education, sectoral awareness and a curriculum supported by mandatory courses.

In summary, the HealthTürkiye portal and brand are significant initiatives with the potential to elevate Türkiye's international health system standing. If applied correctly, they will increase the country's reputation and market share in health tourism by offering foreign patients a quality and reliable experience. However, for this to succeed, the digital platform must remain trustworthy, user friendly and open to continuous improvement; concerns about data privacy must be resolved for acceptance by both health tourists and professionals. All stakeholders in the health tourism ecosystem must collaborate toward a common objective and seek solutions together to the challenges encountered, for the sustainable success of the HealthTürkiye brand to be possible.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has comprehensively examined the strategic role of the HealthTürkiye portal and brand in Türkiye's international health system, based on new legislative regulations and implementation components. Based on the findings and discussions, the following conclusions can be drawn: the HealthTürkiye brand and portal have become Türkiye's international showcase and coordination platform in the field of health tourism. With the new regulation, mandatory portal membership and performance monitoring offer a robust mechanism for enhancing and standardizing service quality across health institutions. Through the portal and its associated components, the aim is to deliver an integrated and reliable service experience aligned with the expectations of the digital age for international patients. The HealthTürkiye brand has consolidated Türkiye's health tourism vision under a single umbrella, strengthening its international promotional power and enabling data-driven policy-making through digitalization. However, it is clear that the success of this transformation depends on careful management of data security, system compatibility, and stakeholder coordination.

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations are made for policymakers and practitioners:

- **For Policymakers:** Continuous support and improvement are essential for the sustainable success of the HealthTürkiye portal. The portal's technical infrastructure should be regularly updated, and its capacity expanded to accommodate increasing user demand. Legal regulations should be established in line with international standards on data security and patient privacy; the

confidentiality and anonymity of data collected through the portal must be guaranteed. Feedback from professional associations and healthcare institutions should be taken into account, and regulatory improvements should be made to the performance criteria and portal operations when necessary. For instance, the objectivity of patient satisfaction surveys or the fairness of financial performance criteria should be periodically assessed. Furthermore, to globally promote the portal, international trade fairs, digital advertising campaigns, and diplomatic channels should be utilized, and awareness of the HealthTürkiye brand in target markets should be increased. Finally, through educational initiatives like USHAŞ Academy, the human resource capacity of the health tourism sector should be developed, and the training of qualified personnel capable of adapting to the innovations brought by the portal should be supported.

- **For Practitioners (Healthcare and Intermediary Institutions):** To be successful within the HealthTürkiye system, it is critically important that institutions invest in digital infrastructure and human resources. Healthcare facilities should strengthen their internal information systems to ensure integration with the HealthTürkiye portal, and internal processes should be optimized to ensure accurate and timely data entry. International health tourism units should be supported with staff who are fluent in various languages and possess intercultural communication skills. Continuous training programs should be organized to improve patient satisfaction, and personnel should be specialized in international patient relations. Institutions can enhance their corporate reputation by responding to patient requests received via the portal as promptly as possible (aiming to meet the 48-hour rule). They should also closely monitor the data from satisfaction surveys and complaint notifications to support their internal quality improvement programs. To remain competitive in the health tourism market, it is also important to effectively utilize the global visibility provided by the HealthTürkiye brand. Institutions should keep their profiles and content on the portal up to date, highlight their treatment packages and success stories, and make themselves appealing to prospective patients. Lastly, all activities should comply with ethical and legal standards; for example, misleading promises should be avoided in promotional content, and full compliance with portal regulations should be ensured. In doing so, every institution within the HealthTürkiye ecosystem will contribute not only to its own success but also to enhancing Türkiye's overall image in health tourism.

In conclusion, the HealthTürkiye portal and brand represent an ambitious and innovative move that raises the bar for health tourism in Türkiye. Supported by a regulatory framework, this initiative has the potential to elevate Türkiye to a higher tier in the international health market if implemented correctly and embraced by all stakeholders. The analysis and recommendations presented in this article aim to highlight both the strengths and areas for improvement of the HealthTürkiye initiative.

Future studies should focus on the concrete outputs of the HealthTürkiye portal (increase in the number of foreign patients, changes in satisfaction scores, economic returns, etc.) and evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy with quantitative data. However, it is already apparent that the HealthTürkiye brand has been designed to play a central role in Türkiye's vision of becoming a “global star of health.” Realizing this vision is possible through the coordinated efforts of the public and private sectors. All stakeholders in the medical tourism ecosystem have the opportunity to come together under the HealthTürkiye umbrella and create a shared story of quality, trust, and success.

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Declaration of Research and Publication Ethics

This study does not require ethics committee approval and/or legal/private authorization is compatible with research and publication ethics.

Researcher's Contribution Rate Declaration

The authors declare that they have contributed equally to the article.

Researcher's Conflict of Interest Declaration

There are no potential conflicts of interest in this study