

# Healthcare Experiences of Migrant Japanese Elderlies in Malaysia: A Qualitative Study

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# 1. Background

Japanese who move to live in overseas for longstay is increasing over the years, estimated as **1.6 million people**. (Long Stay Foundation, 2019)

Since 2007, **Malaysia** has been ranked as number one destination country for overseas retirement among Japanese elderly for **13 consecutive years**. (Long Stay Foundation, 2019)

Malaysian government is actively holding recruiting seminars in various cities in Japan, under the program called **“Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H)”**. (Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia, 2014)



Long-stay Seminar in Tokyo, Japan  
(Source: Malaysia Magazine Website)

# Why Malaysia is a Popular Destination for Retirement Overseas?

- **Warm Climate**
- **Cheaper Cost of Living than Home Country**
- **Stable & Long-term Visa Program**

## **Malaysia My Second Home (MM2H):**

Malaysia government program to grant a visa for **10 years (renewable)** to foreigners who meet the eligibility criteria:

- Offshore Monthly Income of More Than RM10,000 (equivalent to about US\$ 2,400)
- Bank Deposit in Malaysia with More Than RM350,000 (equivalent to about US\$ 84,000)
- Report of Current & Previous Illness/Ailments

# 1. Background - Statistics

## Number of MM2H Visa Issued to Japanese by Year

2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Cumulative (2007-2018)
198	210	169	195	423	816	739	428	300	281	352	233	4,344

Note: This is not necessarily the number of people who came to live in Malaysia. Under this visa, applicant can bring spouse and unmarried children aged under 21.

MM2H website: <http://www.mm2h.gov.my/index.php/en/home/programme/statistics>

# What is known about the healthcare utilization among the retired elderlies living overseas?

British pensioners in Spain reported their experience of healthcare system in Spain as pleasant encounter, despite of language barrier. (Legido-Quigley and McKee, 2012)

American senior citizens in Mexico have high satisfaction with the medical care services that are available in Mexico. (Amin and Ingman, 2010)

Some of the UK citizens in Turkey make regular trips back to the UK in order to maintain eligibility for and/or make use of the National Health Service. (Bahar et al., 2009)

# Research Questions

- What are the pertinent issues related to ***healthcare seeking behavior*** of Japanese retirees in Malaysia?
- What are the factors affecting ***healthcare service utilization*** among Japanese retirees in Malaysia?

## 2. Methods

Qualitative Research:

### Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

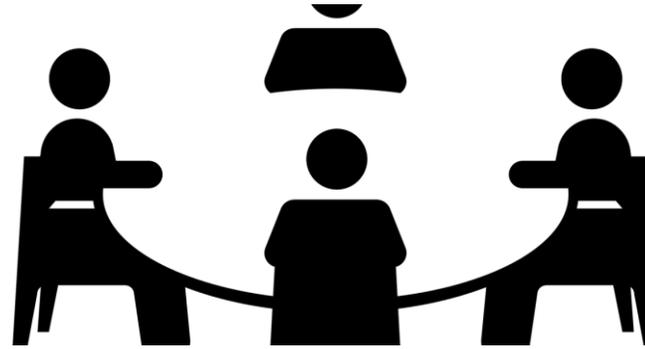
30 Japanese retirees living in:

- Kuala Lumpur
- Ipoh

### In-Depth Interviews (IDIs)

8 stakeholders:

- Government Officials
- Travel Agents
- Hospital Manager
- Japanese Medical Interpreters



# 2. Methods

## Focus Group Questions (Interview Guides)

- What are the worries and concerns you have in relation to your healthcare services in Malaysia?
- What do you consider to be the most attractive part of medical services in Malaysia?
- Is the word-of-mouth from your friends who are Japanese retirees in Malaysia helpful in deciding about your healthcare services in Malaysia?
- What kind of information do you need to help you in making decisions about which hospitals to go to?

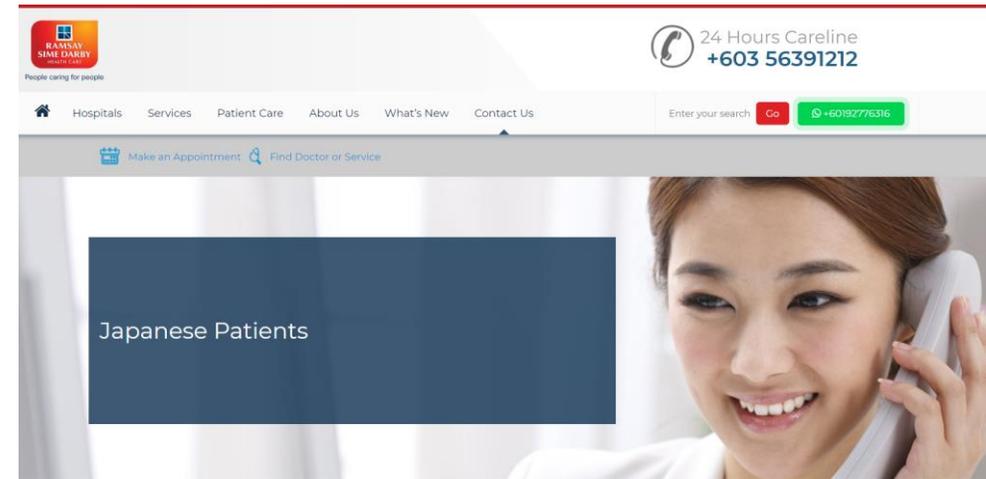


**Thematic analysis** (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used for data analysis.

# Medical Interpreters in the Private Hospitals in Malaysia

In most of the large-scale private hospitals in Kuala Lumpur, medical interpreters are on duty and the foreign patients can use the service for free of charge.

The Japanese retiree patients can call local hospitals in Malaysia and speak in Japanese language to make appointments.



## Interpretation Services

We are able to provide professional interpretation services for both Korean and **Japanese speakers**, using a network of trusted interpreters with experience working alongside healthcare professionals at Ramsay Sime Darby Health Care.

Source: ramsay Sime Darby Hospital:

<https://www.ramsaysimedarby.com/patient-care/interpreter-services/>

# Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

FGDs (n=30)

Criteria	
Age (average) in years	54-79 (65.2)
Gender	
Male	14
Female	16
Final School Attended	
University	18
High School	8
Special School	3
Junior High School	1
Years living in Malaysia (average)	0.5-20 (5.5)

IDIs (n=8)

Type of professions	
Government officials	2
Travel Agent	1
Hospitals Managers	1
Japanese interpreters	4

# 3. Results

## *Factors Influencing Healthcare Seeking Behavior*

- Language Barriers
- Healthcare Decisions
- Medical Check-ups
- Healthcare Insurance
- Nursing and Palliative Care
- Trust and Distrust of Healthcare Services
- Word-of-mouth Information

# Language Barriers

Participants mentioned their inability to communicate in English when visiting hospitals in Malaysia. Although the English proficiency level of most of the Japanese retirees in Malaysia is not good, they are reluctant to improve their ability to speak English while living in Malaysia. They spend most of their day among other Japanese retirees, watch news in Japanese through Japanese cable TV, and read Japanese newspapers and websites.

*I think it is better to speak in your mother tongue. If I say I have pain, then they say I must undergo surgery, then I am in trouble. If I say itchy pain, then well, that is not the type for which surgery is needed, it could be treated. So, if the judgment of the doctor depends on what I say, I feel safer to consult a Japanese doctor. (Male Japanese Retiree)*

# Nursing and Palliative Care

A compelling issue for some of Japanese retirees was nursing and palliative care. For Japanese retirees in Malaysia, they perceive palliative care as the treatment for those who are terminally ill. Whereas, nursing care is a service for someone with relatively mild chronic symptoms and difficulty in performing daily activities due to old age, and they need assistance to carry out daily activities.

*I am contemplating to live for the rest of my life in Malaysia. It is good so long as we can do things by ourselves, but as there maybe times when we need to rely on someone more or less, to attend to our needs and live a meaningful life. Is there such a facility which allows us to live in such a way in Malaysia? (Male Japanese Retiree).*

# Trust and Distrust of Healthcare Services

Japanese retirees in Malaysia were not only concerned about the quality of medical staff such as doctors and nurses, but also other equipment operators and cleaning staff in the hospitals.

*They may have excellent medical equipment, but I am worried about the quality of medical staff. Can they operate the machine effectively? Can they interpret the diagnostic results the same way as doctors in Japan? What are the perceptions and practices of hygiene among nurses? (Female Japanese Retiree)*

# Word-of-mouth Information

Word-of-mouth information with regard to healthcare is the most trusted source among Japanese population. They prefer and trust any information about hospitals, treatments and other healthcare services from other Japanese retirees who live in the country, rather than the local people.

*We feel Japanese people have a better grasp of our needs with regards to medical services in Malaysia. So, we prefer to ask Japanese retirees who live in Malaysia rather than local people. (Female Japanese Retiree)*

# 3. Results

## *Factors Affecting Japanese Retirees' Healthcare Service Utilization*

- Health Beliefs
- Health Insurance
- Medical Symptoms
- Language Barriers
- Voluntary Health Repatriation to Japan
- Psychological Support

# Health Beliefs

Health beliefs is a wide range of personal thinking and behaviors such as attitudes, values and knowledge that people develop throughout their lives, pertaining to healthcare services. For Japanese retirees in Malaysia, the beliefs had been established beforehand, through their previous encounters with healthcare services in Japan. Any negative discrepancy between the medical systems in Japan and Malaysia would be perceived as unfamiliar/unacceptable medical services.

*Basically, I adopt (the idea of) preventive medicine, I try various things to not become sick, so, about the worries and concerns, I do not have. Up until now, I've been having medical check-ups once a year in Japan, and now I am looking for a medical institution in Malaysia which can offer me a similar level of service.  
(Male Japanese Retiree)*

# Health Insurance

For most of the Japanese retirees, healthcare insurance coverage is the key determinant in selecting a hospital.

They prefer to use a cashless service. Using the service, the transaction is dealt with directly by hospitals and insurance companies.

*Then, I went to private hospital next, in that case, I used the medical insurance, but that takes a lot of time... we have to write a lot, but, that is cashless, so it is very helpful. As I was having ureteral calculi, that shockwave and the hospitalization for 1 or 2 days, cost about 400,000 yen. So, the insurance is invaluable.*

*(Female Japanese Retiree)*

# Voluntary Health Repatriation to Japan

It is an understandable fact that many Japanese retirees go back to Japan when they have a serious illnesses. When surgery is required, it is a big life event, so the Japanese retirees prefer to choose a hospital in their home country, to eliminate worries of miscommunication in a foreign country and culture.

*If there is something big to our health happened, it is probably better that we return (to Japan). If nothing happened, and everything goes well, we want to stay longer. I feel like that now. (Male Japanese retiree)*

# 4. Discussions

## Voluntary Health Repatriation to Japan:

The elderly are more likely to avoid potentially negative situations by using their prior knowledge and wisdom. (Makowski et al., 2015) For most Japanese retirees in Malaysia, going back to Japan (their homeland) to receive medical treatment is the safest and most feasible option.

**From the standpoint of destination country (Malaysia), this is a missed opportunity to provide high quality medical services to Japanese elderlies in Malaysia. Not only the advancement in medical technology but also the strengthening of both physical and psychological care is needed.**

# 4. Discussions

## Language Barrier:

Due to language barrier, various types of miscommunication in healthcare settings are prone to occur among Japanese retirees in Malaysia.

Some Japanese retirees also make their own diagnoses, based largely on Internet or inferences drawn from their previous experiences with healthcare providers in Japan.

The assistance of Japanese interpreters enhances their capacity to comprehend the language, but the communication aspect of language barriers is harder to overcome, even with the help of the interpreters.

**An awareness program is necessary, to be conducted by the private hospitals or by the Malaysian government, to inform Japanese retirees in Malaysia so that they can familiarize themselves to the systems of healthcare services in Malaysia.**

# 5. Conclusions

Many Japanese retirees wish to spend their retirement life overseas, and Malaysia is the most popular destination among Japanese elderly.

In terms of healthcare, they cope to communicate with local doctors with the use of medical interpreters, but miscommunications are prone to happen, with language barrier, and unreliable information via word-of-mouth.

It is recommended that Malaysia government, in cooperation with Japanese experts, conduct awareness building program regarding how to access local clinics and hospitals, for Japanese retirees upon their arrival to Malaysia.

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Thank You

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