
Medical Tourism in the Globalised Scenario : Progress and Opportunities in India

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Abstract

In the recent past, a trend known as medical tourism has emerged wherein citizens of highly developed countries choose to travel to less developed areas of the world to receive a wide variety of medical services. Medical tourism refers to growing practices of traveling across international borders in order to receive health care services. A medical tourism company arranges and facilitates the patient's flight, hotel accommodation and the schedule of the surgery. Medical tourism is a new concept for India. Western medical tourists are particularly drawn to India to avoid waiting lists in home countries. The State-of-the-art medical equipment, modern hospitals, board-certified surgeons and world-class standards of nursing set India on par with other Asian medical destinations. Indian medical professionals are recognized all over the world and they provide world-class health care at an affordable price. With skyrocketing hospitalization and treatment cost in developed countries, India is rapidly expanding its base in this unique sector. A number of public and private hospitals in the country have also received accolades abroad. This paper is an analysis on the under trained in Medical Tourism in India on the basis of secondary information.

Key words: *Medical Tourism, International Medical Travel, Corporate Hospitals,*

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Introduction

In the globalized market economy, the ability of nations to create, absorb and commercialise innovations determines their competitiveness and the success of any country is largely depended upon the realization and utilization of its potential strengths in the field of science and technology. Medical Tourism is one of such fields with immense potential and excellent growth opportunities in today's globalised environment. Citizens of many countries have long traveled to United States and to developed countries of Europe to seek the expertise and advanced technology available in leading medical centers. In the recent past, a trend known as medical tourism has emerged wherein citizens of highly developed countries choose to travel to less developed areas of the world to receive a wide variety of medical services.

Objectives

- To ascertain the origin and growth of Medical Tourism industry in India.
- To assess merits and demerits of Medical Tourism in India.
- To study the present situation of Medical Tourism Industry in India.
- To identify major corporate hospitals in India offering treatment to medical tourists.
- To examine the future of medical tourism industry in India.

Methodology:

The present study is based on secondary data from Books, Newspapers, Journals, Periodicals, concerned websites and unpublished materials in this area for analyzing the prospects and problems of medical tourism in India.

Literature Review

Stuart Ben (2011) in his study showed that India received hundreds of thousands of tourists who came to the country to undergo medical treatments and then left the country for back home. **India was one of the first countries to recognize the potential of medical tourism and today is the leading destination for global medical tourists.** Already in 2004, India has received 150,000 medical tourists

and this number has grown by a whopping 33% by 2008 to 200,000 inbound medical tourists. It is estimated that by the year 2015, India will receive over half a million medical tourists annually.

Maheshwari S. (2011) described that India has the highest potential in medical tourism in the world; factors such as low cost, scale and range of treatments differentiate it from other medical tourism destinations. Moreover, the growth in India's medical tourism market would be a boon for several associated industries including the hospital industry, the medical equipment industry, and the pharmaceutical industry. In terms of medical tourists, the number would touch 1.3 million by 2013. However, the industry is at a nascent stage and requires a few years to reach the platform already established by the IT sector.

Rana Kapoor (2011) stated that India has been ranked among the top five destinations for medical tourism. As suggested by the study that it would depend upon government policies, faith of the patients and many other external factors whether or not the potential of this growth rate of 71.87% for medical tourism could be achieved.

Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham) in its study "Emerging Trends In Domestic Medical Tourism Sector", estimated the current worth of Indian medical tourism industry at around Rs 4,500 crore with about 8.5 lakh foreign patients annually getting treated in the country and that the number of foreign patients visiting the country would cross 32 lakh by 2015. As per the study, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, West Bengal and New Delhi are fast emerging as India's best medical centres with facelifts, dental and Botox treatment, tummy tucks, eye care etc. being the most sought after treatments. Further, with holistic medicinal services like yoga, meditation, ayurveda, and allopath etc., India offers a plethora of facilities difficult to match in other countries.

Mike Nithavarianakis (2012) said that UK could take the help of Indian Physicians in some of the advanced healthcare facilities which were provided at affordable cost to people. Similarly, UK could offer help in the primary healthcare system which could be very useful.

Dr Prem Jagyasi (2012) expressed that in the past few years medical tourism industry had arisen as an upcoming meadow. However, the struggle in this field was also growing. Healthcare professionals, dealing with medical tourism now need to work harder to make and uphold their place in this industry. They needed to be conscious of all the minute particulars that made the whole medical tourism industry work. They have to be well conversant with the various certification programs, legal and ethical issues involved in this.

Discussion - Global Trend in Medical Tourism:

Medical Tourism has started in the 80s and 90s when patients began looking for more affordable options other than what was offered in their homeland or country. In the late 1980s, Cuba started programs to attract foreigners from countries like India, Latin America and Europe for more affordable eye surgeries, heart surgery and cosmetic procedures. Thailand also became a hot destination for plastic surgery and other routine medical procedures in the late 1990s. On the other hand, New Zealand is getting more popular in hip and knee replacements surgery. India, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand are well-established medical tourism destinations. Several highly developed nations including Belgium, Canada, Germany, Israel, and Italy are also attracting foreign patients under the banner of medical tourism offering sophisticated modern care with careful attention to patient preference, service, and satisfaction. These countries have actively promoted healthcare trade and that have become popular for patients seeking cardiac surgery and orthopedic surgery, Dental surgery, cosmetic surgery and other more serious kinds of surgery. Many of their hospitals have become centers of excellence and subsequently reaped the benefits. They are still trying to reach the best of International standards by continuously reorienting themselves.

Medical Tourism in India - An overview:

Medical tourism is relatively a new concept for India. But, it is a fast growing sector in the country. India's medical tourism sector is expected to experience an annual growth rate of 30%. India is truly a home to an abundance of cutting-edge facilities employing internationally trained and highly skilled doctors and

surgeons. Today, India has the best hospitals providing excellent services to many foreigners with prices as low as 10% of those in the United States.

Western medical tourists are particularly drawn to India to avoid waiting lists in home countries. With state-of-the-art medical equipment, modern hospitals, board-certified surgeons and world-class standards of nursing facilities, India is set on par with other Asian medical destinations such as Thailand and Singapore. Foreign patients perceive India as one of the best global healthcare destination with traditional tourist attraction. They are coming from the land of the world's super power, US, oil-rich Gulf and even from New Zealand. With an abundance of breathtaking scenery, magnificent religious monuments, remarkable diversity and warm hearts of its people, incredible India offers an enchanting experience to medical tourists.

Almost all major states in India like Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh. Kerala and Gujarat have become the destinations of high quality treatment. While Kerala occupies predominant place for conventional systems like ayurvedha and sidha, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu and New Delhi exhort people to use their unlimited potential in allopathy. Post procedure, India offers a wealth of recovery options and locations conducive to recuperation. Along with aftercare services from hospitals, convalescence programs may incorporate traditional yoga, Ayurvedic massage and meditation retreats. Long before medical tourists from various parts of the world began seeking medical treatments like surgery and other procedures abroad, there was already yoga and meditation centers in India for medical travelers who were more inclined to alternative medicine. And even when Western clinical medicine became more popular and credible, India remained the best destination for alternative medicine practitioners from all over the world.

Apart from the above, a number of other public and private hospitals in the country have also received accolades abroad. The Apollo Group has been the forerunner in this sector having treated lakhs of foreign patients. A considerable number of beds in the above hospitals are always occupied by patients from abroad. Specialized medical cares are provided in these

centers for serious health problems. India boasts of having some of the best hospitals and health centers in the world and is one of the more favorable destinations because of its infrastructure and technology which can compete with those in the United States, United Kingdom and Europe.

Critical assessment of the effects of Medical Tourism:

As an industry, medical tourism could provide the following benefits to the nation as well as to medical tourists visiting India. A Developing country like India could earn huge revenues in foreign currency through this sector. A number of reputed healthcare centers in India provide excellent medical facilities on par with hospitals in well developed countries. Quality standards and qualified professionals of Indian Medical Tourism make this industry highly competitive in the world market. US citizen Kipp Finn who was treated for a facelift at Manipal Hospital, Bangalore, says "The US healthcare system is privatized and that market philosophy is bankrupt. Indian doctors are topnotch, highly professional and personal." All medical investigations in these hospitals are carried out using technologically advanced equipments. Stringent quality measures are assured in many places. Medical offerings in India are comprehensive, specializing in the full spectrum of surgical and high-end medical procedures. Indian hospitals provide a range of medical packages from eye and dental care, kidney transplant, cosmetic surgery, orthopedic and heart surgery to IVF procedures. Specialties extend across neurology, neurosurgery, oncology, ophthalmology, plastic surgery, gynecology, general medicine and general surgery. India has become a major destination for low-cost medical care at top international standards.

Traditional forms of health care in India like ayurveda, homeopathy, sidha and meditation have received international acclamation because of their true value and benefits. Many foreigners who failed in allopathy system in their places are increasingly moving towards alternative therapy. They may save a lot of money, at the same time, be able to have their much- needed best vacation.

The lower healthcare costs in India, also gives the patients an opportunity to experience a new culture and have a vacation in an exotic country. Patients have their vacation in a foreign land while recuperating. The golden sands and palm fringed beaches of Goa, colorful culture of Chennai, the pace of New Delhi, the magnitude of glorious Bombay and the effortless enchantment of Agra and Rajasthan, provide an excellent opportunity to mix leisure and healthcare at low cost. States like Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra offer fantastic chances for tourists to experience the gifts of nature along with the medical care.

India has had phenomenal success rate with medical software. "Many application software used in Position Emission tomography (PET) and computed tomography (CT) were developed in India," "Same is the case with volume computed tomography (VCT) that has the ability to scan the heart in few seconds. About 20 percent of the technology of VCT comes from India," he noted. His company, an MNC, sees the Indian workforce that has highly educated and trained technicians and competent doctors, strong economy and cost advantage as positive factors for investing in India. This will take Indian medical industry to newer heights.

Regardless of rich dividends of medical tourism, there are also some severe criticisms against its emergence in India:

Strong objections are raised about the presence of Medical Tourism in India. According to a report of World Health Organization (WHO), "India has less than one hospital bed and one doctor per one thousand people." When top class services are given for foreign medical tourists, this exhibits contradiction. The quality of treatment to average billion people in India were unable to get proper health care', a recent study revealed. Since many specialists in reputed private hospitals are normally drawn from the public health sector, medical tourism may divert potential personnel to the corporate houses instead of serving the common people. This is against the ethics and philosophy of any nation. The government encourages the formation of a number of hospitals by providing a

variety of subsidies in the forms of land, electricity and tax. A large portion of money spent on healthcare in India went to the private sector hospitals. Competition had grown to such an extent that some of these clinics lure foreigners with commercial interests. Majority of our population is deprived of quality medical care that they rightly deserve.

Medical tourists also face the risks of acquiring infectious diseases in India which are quite different from other parts of the globe. The patients who are still weak after their surgery have no natural immunity to foreign diseases and this may be one big hazard they have to face.

One thing that should be looked in medical tourism is the quality of post-operative care. Post-operative care might not have the high standards of US and European standards. For medical procedures involving longer recovery periods, the patient needs to make postoperative arrangements on his own. This could mean consulting a local doctor in one's home town aside from the foreign health care provider that supervised the original surgery or treatment. Concerns have been voiced regarding the risk of complications resulting from travel and vacation activities in the postoperative period. The management of postoperative complications that occur after a patient returns from an offshore medical facility, and the consequent costs of this care, are difficult issues that need to be addressed. There are legal and ethical issues. In case problems arise, patients or medical tourists might not be covered by their personal insurance or might not be able to seek damages and compensation.

Conclusion

Medical tourism is becoming increasingly a popular global trend. It is apparent that medical tourism is changing the healthcare landscape around the world and there is every reason to believe that this trend will continue to evolve. There is a compelling need for all parties involved in healthcare to become familiar with medical tourism and to understand the economic, social, political, and medical forces that are driving and shaping this phenomenon. Today, medical tourism is facilitated by the corporate medical sector which is looking for opportunities beyond the domestic market.

This phenomenon is driven by marketplace forces and occurs outside the purview and control of the organized healthcare system. Medical tourism has important concerns and challenges as well as potential opportunities. Nonetheless, medical tourism has opportunities due to modern technology and hassle-free travel to other countries. More changes can be expected in this industry specifically in terms of openness, adaptiveness and responsiveness. Yet as long as there are sick people and a limited supply of healthcare in some countries, people will continue to travel and medical tourism will continue to be a global phenomenon. It is clear that there is a big difference in the medical expenses in India and countries abroad. It is definite that the number of medical tourists to India will be increasing in the coming years. Facts on the medical tourism indicate a bright future for this industry; Indian companies can gain in this particular situation as long as they provide quality hospital services. It is estimated that medical tourism to Asia could generate as much as \$4.4 billion by 2012 with approximately half of this revenue going to India. Realizing the potential of this industry, major corporate hospitals in metros have responded to this emerging opportunities with professional commitment. Indian hospitals and pharmaceutical companies are investing heavily on infrastructure and the arrangement of the required facilities for attracting foreign tourists. In the present scenario, every opportunity is a business and every business is an opportunity. Indian economy can not remain isolated from global economic trends; it would not be a bad idea to grab the untapped areas of medical tourism industry.

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Appendix:

INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED INDIAN HOSPITALS:

Amrita Institute of Medical Science & Research Centre, Ernakulum

Apollo Hospitals group, Chennai, New Delhi and Hyderabad

All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), New Delhi

Baby Memorial Hospital, Calicut

B.M. Birla Heart Research Centre, Kolkata

Christian Medical College, Vellore, Ludhiana

Dr.Vivek Sagar's Dental Care and Cure Centre Ludhiana

Escorts Heart Institute and Research centre New Delhi and Faridabad

Frontier Lifeline Hospital, Chennai

Fortis Group of Hospitals, Chennai, Bangalore and New Delhi and other major cities

KEM hospital, Mumbai

L.V.Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad

Leelavati Hospital, Bandra Mumbai

M.V. Diabetes Centre, Chennai

Madras Medical Mission, Chennai

Medanta Hospital, Delhi

MIOT hospitals, Chennai

Manipal Hospital, Bangalore

Max Super Specialty Hospital, Mohali and Dehradum

N.M.Excellence, Mumbai

National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS)

P.D. Hinduja National Hospital, Mumbai

Sankara Nethralaya, Chennai

Sri Ramachandra Medical College and Research Institute, Chennai

TATA Memorial Hospital, Mumbai,

Wockhardt Hospitals, Nagpur, Nashik, Bhavnagar and other cities