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AN OVERVIEW ON OPPORTUNITY OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

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Abstract

Medical Tourism business in India is emergent and world of sunshine for those patients who are global trotter and wants their treatment at affordable cost but of high quality. It has enormous prospective for generating jobs and earning huge sum of foreign exchange besides giving a spur to the country's overall monetary growth. Medical tourism is a multi-facet bustle, and basically a service industry, it would be essential that all spheres of the Central and State governments, private sector and voluntary organizations become dynamic partners in the enterprise to attain sustainable expansion in tourism if India is to become a global player in the medical tourism business. The emergence and growth of foreign-oriented medical services; the creation of "hotel-spitals" business-like hospitals, combining high-class medical and hospitality services for a foreign clientele.

The medical tourism business offers soaring prospective for India primarily because of its natural advantages in terms of charge and quality. However the competition is getting intense and the accomplishment in upcoming years will mostly be determined by growth and implementation of a joint approach by various parties in the industry. Medical tourism is highly pretentious to hospitals, travelers, hotels, insurance companies etc. Most common treatments are cardio-vascular surgery, knee transplant, cosmetic surgery, cataract, dental care, hair transplants, liver and kidney transplant. The cause India is a favorable destination is because of its infrastructure and state-of-the-art-technology in which is in par with developed countries. India has some of the best hospitals, healthcare and treatment centers in the world with the best facilities.

Keywords: Medical tourism, hospitals in India, foreign patients, quality and affordable healthcare, hotel-spitals, health tourism, medical travel, Global healthcare.

Medical Tourism

Medical tourism is defined as the patient movement from highly developed nations to other areas of the world for medical care usually to find treatment at lower cost.

But such medical tourism is poles apart from the traditional model of international movement of people in search of better health care and facilities from their own nation to other that is unavailable in their own nations. Generally, the movement is from less developed countries to the developed ones ^[1].

Medical tourism also called medical travel, health tourism or global healthcare is a fast growing industry and it adds considerable returns to the national income of India as well as the other many countries of the world that have identified Medical tourism as a national industry. India is still in its nascent or infancy stage for medical tourism. Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Brazil, Turkey, Philippines, South Africa, Cuba, Costa Rica, New Zealand, UAE and Sri Lanka are desired destination for the world as medical tourism is concerned ^[2-4].



History Of Development

The concept of medical tourism is not new one. The movement of people from one place to another for the sake of finding better facilities is seen from thousands of years older. When Greek pilgrims traveled from all over the Mediterranean to the small territory in sardonic gulf called Epiduria. Epidura became the original travel destination for medical tourism.

The development of medical tourism started when people could get the knowledge of things happening around the world through communication. They became aware of available of services in their own as well as other nations of the world. Also, the comparison of the standard services and their cost began which compelled people to move to those places where they could get the required assistances in bearable investments^[5].

In India, since the British rule the medical tourists are coming here for treatment. Then defined reason was their rule in India during which they could force Indians to do their treatment. But according to passage of time the things have changed a lot. The emergence and growth of foreign-oriented medical services; the creation of "hotel-hospitals," business-like hospitals, combining high-class medical and hospitality services for a foreign clientele ^[6].

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|----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Mere Tourist ! | 2. Medicated Tourist ! | 3. Medical Tourist Proper ! | 4. Vacationing Patient ! | 5. Mere Patient ! |
|----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|

A Typology of Medical Tourists (Different types of tourists and patients)

Reasons

There are various reasons for patients moving from their own country to other, the chief one is the "cost". Other services typically sought by the travelers include- elective procedures as well as complex procedures and specialized surgeries like- cardiac surgery, joint replacement, dental surgery, ocular surgeries and cosmetic surgeries [7-8].

Individuals with rare genetic disorders may travel to other countries which hold the optimum condition and where treatment of genetic disorders is better prevails.

1. Best of the medical facilities and expertise are not available in the parent country of the tourist. This is mostly applicable to the developed and under developed countries.
2. Convenience and speedy availability of medical care as per patient's choice.
3. Higher cost of medical care.
4. Hurdles faced by patient regarding medical insurance settlement etc. in western countries (Such as non cover of orthopedic surgery i.e. knee, hip replacement, restrictions on the choice of the facility, surgeon or prosthetics to be used).

5. Long waiting list for minor or major medical procedure is maintained in countries like USA, UK, etc.
6. Improvements in technology and standards of medical care are now available in other countries at lower cost.
7. Efficiency of Indian doctors, supporting staff and personal attention in patient care.
8. The ease and affordability of international travel.
9. Affordable travel destination visit packages along with surgery.
10. Charm of India as its culture, vividness, spirituality, care and concern for the patient and treated guests like gods.

Trends Of Medical Tourism In India

Medical tourism industry is a fast growing sector in India and is expected to experience an annual growth rate of 25 to 30% by the year 2015.

The medical treatment in western countries is becoming costlier day by day and as a result, patients are entering India to find a quality medical care in cheaper rates. An estimate states that 1, 50,000 to 2,00,000 patients travel to India for low cost health care procedures every year [9].

Attractions For Various Portfolios For The Medical Tourists

India is attracting patients from other parts of the world by providing medical care of high quality standard at low rates comparing to other developed nations, by availing the

latest medical technologies and most important removing the hindrances of communication due to language barrier appointing translators at all reputed hospitals, nursing homes, medical consultancies etc ^[10]

- General surgery
- Orthopedics and joint replacements (knee/hip)
- Cardiovascular surgeries
- Blood vessel system surgery
- Male reproductive system and urinary tract
- Female reproductive system and pregnancy
- Fertility surgery
- Weight loss surgery (Bariatric Surgery)
- Hair transplant
- Psychiatry
- Convalescent care
- Tuberculosis
- Oncology (cancer)
- Ocular surgeries like: glaucoma, cataract, ARMD
- Kidney and urinary tract system (Nephro surgery)
- Laparoscopic surgery (minimally invasive)
- Neurosurgery and spine procedures
- Hernia repair surgery
- Stomach, liver and bowel
- Cosmetic, plastic and prosthetic surgeries
- Burial services too.

Steps Taken For Advancements Of Medical Tourism In India

The day by day increment in the number of medical tourists in India is due to certain assistances provided by Indian government as well as the hospitals, nursing homes etc. to the foreigners ^[11-13].

- The government is taking steps to address infrastructure issues that hinder the countries growth in medical tourism for this it avails the budget for latest introduced devices, procedures of treatment etc to the health department. Also, the government is providing extra budget for the research in the field of medicines and procurement of same from other places.
- The government has also removed the visa restrictions on tourist visa that required a two month gap between consecutive visits for people from gulf countries which is likely to boost the medical tourism.
- A visa on arrival scheme for the tourists from selected countries has been instituted which allows foreign nationals to stay in India for 30 days for medical reasons.
- Noida, a developed sector in India has hired different language translators specially for the people from Balkan countries and African countries to make them feel more comfortable and facilitate them with their better treatment at right place

- India provides quality treatment in the budget of about one tenth of that in United States of America, Canada, Australia, France, Luxemburg, Switzerland, Germany, Italy or England which is comparatively very low. The people with limited finance even from are bound to move to India because of so expensive treatment in their own nation.
- The most popular treatment sought in India by medical tourists is – alternative medicines, bone marrow transplants, cardio surgery, ocular surgery and hip replacement.
- The availability of herbal drugs like herbs and shrubs in India is another fascinating point for the patients because of patients being lured towards nature due to growing side effects of allopathic medicines. Thus people also travel to India to adopt natural procedures of curing diseases as in Ayurvedic system.
- Lower cost doesn't necessarily mean lower health care standards. There are 18 Joint Commission International (JCI), accredited hospitals in India. But for this the patient travelling to India must find the optimal doctor-hospital combination. There are many such institutions or facilitators which help tourists to find optimal doctor- hospital combination. E.g. –Surgery Assistance India.

Facilities Provided To Medical Tourists (At A Glance)

- Availability of advanced equipments etc

- Availability of medical experts
- Low –cost consulting fee
- Low treatment cost
- No waiting period for tourists for treatment
- Specialty treatment
- Treatment cum leisure destination

Consequences Of Medical Tourism/Tourists On India

Advantages

- Advancing the medical tourism in India attracts more and more health tourist from all over the world and as a result it adds to earn foreign currency and increase the national revenue.
- It helps India to uplift its medical care services.

The hospitals or nursing homes either in public or private sector, in order to lure foreigners uplift the standard of medical care services with advanced technologies. The benefit of this upliftment is also utilized by the natives of India. The good medical care is passed in all corners of the country with rising number of healthy citizens ^[11, 14].

- India can make a remarkable mark of its presence in the world which in no way shall be denied by others in context of medical services.
- Job opportunities for a number of jobless members of Indian health care team i.e. doctor, pharmacists, etc. will increase at an alarming rate because the increase in the number of tourists will simultaneously

increase the demand for health workers in India. Thus biggest social issue "unemployment" can be solved.

- The cultural and natural heritages of the country will be more popularized throughout the world with increasing no of tourists every year.

Disadvantages

- It makes health sector highly commercial and the common man in the country will be hard pressed for medical care.
- All the resources of health sector will be thrown open for the international tourists so much that the so called "middle man" will be able to ill afford the medical care.
- Patients from overseas, if they come in droves may bring in new types of diseases and the risk of infection. As e.g. HIV AIDS, swine flu, bird flu, hepatitis B, typhoid, amoebic dysentery, TB, influenza, mosquito borne diseases, deep vein thrombosis etc. have come from western countries and have now been impossible to be completely eradicated from the Indian society.
- In the name of medical tourism, many people who want to enjoy themselves in this country with the ostensible intension for treatment in the country may turn hospitals into some merry making resorts. Also such practice of some particular group of people will bring even the right ones to be suspected in the eyes of law.
- We know the cost of treatment in India is less in comparison to western countries,

even though the complications of treating and risk of saving the life of patient is almost the same either in India or abroad.

- Medical tourism centered on new technologies, such as stem cell treatments, is often criticized on grounds of fraud, blatant lack of scientific rationale and patient safety.
- Local patients suffer more as doctors are busier with foreign counterparts.
- Medical malpractices and complicated law suits of another country.

Preliminaries Required Starting A Center Of Excellence For Medical Tourism ^[14]

- It requires huge financial investment for latest modern set up in medical centre.
- Good infrastructure and availability of convenient transport for tourists
- Up gradation of medical facilities from time to time
- Availability of excellent accommodation facilities
- Cost affordability and Insurance cover
- Highly trained man power
- A good coordination between government policies and medical industry
- Legal protection in medical disputes
- Accreditation of medical facilities by IOS (International Organization of Standardization) and JCI (Joint Commission International formed in USA in 1994), The United Kingdom Accreditation Forum (UKAF) or government regulatory authority like Medical Council of India (MCI) and Health Ministry of India. Differences in healthcare

provider standards around the world have been recognized by the World Health Organization, and in 2004 it launched the World Alliance for Patient Safety.

- Hospitals, institutes having availability of all facilities under one roof, such as, various surgical procedures, physiotherapy, dentistry etc.
- A need of proper pricing policy as per accredited medical facilities is must.
- A good marketing strategy is required to promote medical tourism by medical service providers

Conclusion

Confederation of Indian industry reported that 150,000 medical tourists come to India in 2005, based on according to a study by ASSOCHAM it became 850,000 by 2011. Looking forward to this fast growing number of medical tourists, there is an estimate of India experiencing 3,200,000 Medical tourists by the year 2015.

This medical visit of people from all over the world bears both- the "pros" and "cons". The advantages getting from medical tourism are more than the disadvantages being occurred due to them. These disadvantages can be solved with logical and legal steps in right direction. India should approach in a right way to advance the medical tourism in India and strengthen its position.

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