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Review Article



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A Review on Management and Scope of Medical Tourism in India

Patel Harnish K*, Patel Priyanka R

*Editor, IJPRBS, India.

*E-mail: priyankaharnish@yahoo.in

ABSTRACT

India is a good location to receive medical treatments and considered a leader in promoting medical tourism. Healthcare, like food and shelter, is a basic need of Humanity. Given the potential India holds as a healthcare destination, the healthcare tourism sector can be a major source of foreign exchange earning for the country. India's healthcare sector has made impressive strides in recent years and the country is increasingly projected as a 'healthcare hub'. Several features have positioned India as an ideal healthcare destination, like cost effective healthcare solutions, availability of skilled healthcare professionals, reputation for successful treatment in advanced healthcare segments, increasing popularity of India's traditional wellness systems and rapid strides made in information technology. The sector is witnessing a 'reverse brain-drain' trend, with increasing number of specialists, who have been practicing abroad, showing keen interest to come back and practice in India. Such developments further enhance the potential of India as a 'healthcare hub' of the world. People travel to India for availing healthcare services for diverse reasons. Medical tourism in India has emerged as the fastest mounting segment of tourism industry in spite of the global economic recession. Elevated cost of treatments in the developed countries, particularly the USA and UK, has been forcing patients from such regions to look for alternative and cost-effective destinations to get their treatments complete. The Indian medical tourism industry is currently at a budding stage, but has a massive potential for future development and progress. A section of tourists from different parts of the world travel to India for traditional healthcare services, such as Ayurveda and Yoga.

Key words: Medical Tourism, Health care, Medication Cost, Alternative Medicine.

INTRODUCTION

India is a good location to receive medical treatments and considered a leader in promoting medical tourism.

At an approximate growth of 30% each year, studies conducted by government and private sectors in India estimate that medical tourism could bring between \$1-\$2 billion US into India by 2012.

Tourism is traveling for predominantly recreational or leisure purposes or the provision of services to support this leisure travel. The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as people who "travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited". Globally, Tourism has become a popular global leisure activity. In 2006, there were over 842 million international tourist arrivals. (Tourism, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

Tourism is subdivided into

Leisure Tourism Pilgrimage Health Tourism

Winter Tourism Mass Tourism

Tourism is further subdivided into 31 sub divisions as follows:

- Accessible tourism
- Adventure tourism—Hiking, Tramping, Mountaineering
- Agritourism
- Archaeological tourism
- Backpacker Tourism
- Bicycle touring
- Bookstore tourism
- Cultural tourism
- Dark tourism
- Disaster tourism
- Drug tourism
- Ecotourism
- Extreme tourism
- Female sex tourism
- Free Independent Travellers
- Garden tourism
- Heritage tourism
- Literary tourism
- Medical tourism
- Music tourism
- Naked hiking
- Pop-culture tourism
- Perpetual tourism
- Pilgrimages
- Sacred travel
- Safaris
- Sex tourism
- Space tourism
- Sustainable tourism
- Volunteer vacation
- Wine tourism.
- Medical Tourism

Medical tourism (also called medical travel or health tourism) is a term initially coined by travel agencies and the mass media to describe the rapidly-growing practice of traveling to another country to obtain health care. According to Mary Tabacchi, Health Tourism is any kind of travel to make yourself or a member of your family healthier. More recently the phrase "Global Healthcare" has emerged, and may replace the earlier terms. Such services typically include elective procedures as well as complex specialized surgeries such as joint replacement (knee/hip), cardiac surgery, dental surgery, and cosmetic surgeries.

The provider and customer use informal channels of communication-connection-contract, with less regulatory or legal oversight to assure quality and less formal recourse to reimbursement or redress, if needed. Leisure aspects typically associated with travel and tourism may be included on such medical travel trips.

Medical Tourism in India

Medical Tourism industry according to CII is expected to be worth US\$ 4billion by 2017. India has a potential to attract 1 million health tourists per annum which will contribute US\$ 5 billion to the economy. Patients from various countries are becoming medical tourists to India for low cost and health restorative alternative treatments. The Medical Tourists undergo health restorative treatments of a combination of Ayurveda, Yoga, acupuncture, herbal oil massage, nature therapies, and some ancient Indian healthcare methods –such as Vedic care, an alternate healthcare service. Cost Advantage is the attractive aspect of Indian modern medicine which is 10-15 times lower than anywhere in the world.(See, Annexure 1). The CII-McKinsey report suggests that medical tourism could fetch as much as \$2 billion by 2012, compared to an estimated \$ 333 million in 2006-07.

Medical Travel

1. People traveling across borders for healthcare needs
2. Only ambulatory care can be really linked to tourism.
3. Tourism is recreation linked . Is health recreation linked??
4. Serious ailments e.g Heart Surgery, Joint replacements etc which can be treated in Indian Hospitals without any waiting cannot be linked with Tourism

Objectives

India is in the process of becoming the "Global Health Destination". So it is very important to consider some point like a comparative study of the participation of medical tourists from different countries, factors that drive it in India, marketing efforts and success, identify the problems and solution for improvement.

Advantage in India

Unique medical value services to foreign patients that supersedes the competition:

- Yoga
- Meditation /Spiritualism
- Ayurveda healing
- “India offers a unique basket of services to an individual that is difficult to match by other countries” (CII)
- Less regulatory & legal problems
- India has number of World Heritage Monuments & Archeological sites attracting tourists /medical tourists – Requirement strategic marketing for Medical Tourism
- World heritage sites- Taj Mahal, Ajanta & Ellora, Khajuraho, Bhimbetika rock paintings
- Buddhist sites – Shravasti, Kushinagar
- Ancient & religious places – Varanasi, Udaipur,
- Cultural /Festival tourism – Ladakh festival, Khajuraho, festival
- Winter Sports best sites -Skiing – Gulmarg, Auli
- Quality: Large pool of doctors, nurses & paramedics
- Strength: Over 6,50,000 doctors
- Highly skilled experts and Possess English speaking skills

Comfort Level

- NRI doctors recognized as amongst best in adopted countries (First World)
- Usage of English
- Indian Nurses increasingly getting international exposure

Value Proposition

1. Quality medical services at 1/10th costs:
2. Complicated surgical procedures possible at 1/10th the cost

3. Increase in use of Computerized Hospital Information Systems
4. Software technologists facilitating tech revolution in healthcare
5. State-of-the-art medical establishments of great repute

Lower Medication cost

1. Strong Pharma Sector and gaining world recognition
2. Fast emerging as major Drug R&D Center
3. Strong Generic drugs business
4. Low cost of drug development in India
5. No waiting

Tourist Interest

1. 5000 year old civilization
 2. Renowned for Historical, Cultural and Religious diversity
 3. Diverse geographical landmarks; vast coastline
 4. Traditional arts and crafts
 5. Vibrant democracy: Freedom for citizens; empowered women population
 6. Marketing strategies to maximize economic potential
 7. Aggressive marketing & awareness programs globally
- Publish details of Indian Corporate Hospitals with core competencies – Eg Cardiac Surgery – J R Surgery, IVF, Cosmetic Surgery, Dental Surgery
 - Advertise - rates of all procedures in all International / International Magazines, journals, magazines & News Papers of the World
 - Web sites – List, details, Tele & E mail ID of Hospitals & Executives dealing with medical tourism
 - Medical Tourism Companies /Facilitator's address, ISDN, E mails

Establishment of "Indian Medical Tourism Corporation":

1. International Branches
2. Liaison cell with all Indian & Foreign Missions
3. Brochures giving details & pictures of
4. Special attractive treatment , travel & tourism packages at comparative rates
5. Health Insurance for treatment in India
6. Regular Chartered Medical Tourism International Inbound Flights with all peripheral arrangements – in-flight medical care - Car/ ambulance transfer - Hotel – Hospital / Hotel – Wellness tourism-Return to home country– follow up

Alternative Medicine Proposition

1. Ancient Ayurvedic stream of medicines
2. Rejuvenation alternatives: Kerala's health retreats
3. Naturopathy and Yoga
4. Increased visibility & ease of access to leading hospitals, doctors and surgeons who post their skills & specialties, pricing etc on websites has made available a wide choice of treatment to the overseas patients
5. Media is showcasing India's ability to treat overseas patients in a comparable environment

Discussion

India is a perfect destination for medical tourism that combines health treatment with visit to some of the most alluring and awe-inspiring places of the world. A growing number of tourists are flocking in large numbers because of the superlative medical care, equipments and facilities that India offers.

What makes it so attractive

- Foremost is the cost factor. The medical costs in India are one-tenth of the costs in western countries. For instance, a heart surgery costs \$6,000 in India as against \$30,000 in the US. Similarly, a bone marrow transplant costs \$26,000 in India as compared to \$ 2, 50,000 in the US.

- Secondly, foreign patients through Indian hospitals to pass up the long waiting lists and queues in their native countries. Indian hospitals provide immediate attention to patients rather than asking them to wait for several months like in most western countries. Further, foreign patients need not tackle insurance and national medical systems in India as they have to in their native lands.
- India offers the best treatments in modern medicine and in every medical division such as cardiology, orthopedic surgery, eye care, gynecology, cosmetic surgery and dental surgery. It also provides traditional methods of treatment such as Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Naturopathy and Yoga.
- India's private hospitals have gained international recognition for their state-of-the-art facilities and diagnostic centers besides unsurpassed skills. Their technology and procedures are on par with hospitals in developed nations.
- Foreign patients can get package deals including flights, transfers, hotels, treatment and post-operative vacation for their medical visits to India.
- Many foreign patients prefer to combine their leisure and relaxation visits to India with healthcare.
- The Government of India has declared that treating of foreign patients is legal. It is encouraging medical tourism in the country by offering tax breaks and export incentives to participating hospitals. In addition, the Government has cleared medical visas.

Who's in it

The chief cities attracting foreign patients to India are Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Chennai. Similarly, the specialist hospitals excelling in the medical tourism industry in the country are:

1. Escorts Heart Institute and Research Centre Limited, New Delhi
2. All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi
3. Manipal Heart Foundation, Bangalore
4. B. M. Birla Heart Research Centre, Kolkata
5. Breach Candy Hospital, Mumbai etc.

CONCLUSION

The medical tourism industry in India is presently earning revenues of \$333 million. Encouraged by the incredible pace of growth exhibited by the industry, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and McKinsey have predicted that the industry will grow to earn additional revenue of \$2.2 billion by 2012. To provide for brighter prospects for the industry, the hospitals can also acquire international accreditation, integrate traditional and clinical treatments and offer end-to-end value added services by tying up with tour operators, airline carriers and hotel companies. Hospitals can also allow foreign patients to pay through credit and ensure proper support services to foreign patients after they return to their native countries. Lastly, the Government of India can also reinforce its support through quick visa processing, improved flight connectivity and infrastructure development.

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