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Medical tourism in India

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Abstract

Medical tourism is the practice of travelling to other countries to receive medical services, which are sometimes packaged with travel and sightseeing excursions. People who live in one country travel to another country to receive medical, dental and surgical care receiving either equal to or greater care than they would have in their own country. They travel for medical care because of affordability, better access to care or a higher level of quality of care. India with advanced medical services paired with her exotic natural bounties has become a heaven for medical tourists.

Keywords: ayurveda, health services, hospital chains, medical tourism, sunrise industry

Introduction

The newfound need to travel internationally for medical and recreational purpose has come to be known as Medical Tourism. More and more people are travelling outside their home country to get treatment for the ailments/ disease they are suffering from. Cosmetic / Aesthetic surgery has also attained an important reason for people to travel. Given the number of options and opportunities available in India, medical tourism is one of the quickest and largest growing industries in the country as well as the world. And the number of uninsured people and those with high deductibles continues to go up, may many of them opt to be treated outside their native land, where they can manage to pay for the treatments. Medical Tourism in India offers low cost or cost effective medical treatment with no waiting lists and accessibility of skilled and renowned medical experts, the world an easy access. At present, the expectation is that Medical Tourism will continue to grow up at a rapid rate of speed and continue offering medical treatments to tourists at a fraction of the cost they can get at home.

According to Indian Medical/ Health Tourism Service Sector Network Report Sector Overview and SWOT Analysis, within the initiative, Sustainable Industrial Networks and its application on Micro Regional Environmental Planning (SINET) India with advanced medical services, paired with exotic natural bounties has become a heaven for medical tourists. The Medical Tourism Industry in India is poised to be the next big success story after software. The Confederation of India Industry (CII) and McKinsey have predicted that the industry will grow to earn additional revenue for up market tertiary hospitals and will account for 3-5 per cent of the total healthcare delivery market. The Indian medical tourism industry, growing at an annual rate of 30 percent, caters to patients chiefly from the West Asia, Middle East Africa and to Some extent from US and Europe. Although in its nascent stage, the industry is outsmarting similar industries of other countries such as Greece, South Africa, Jordan, Malaysia,

Philippines and Singapore.

India: One of the Preferred Medical Tourism Destination

India has carved a strong niche in the field of Medical Tourism over the years for the reasons of offering Medical Services of international standards at the lowest possible cost. India has a large pool of healthcare facilities of global standard and medical professionals par excellence besides highly trained and empathetic support staff. The country offers the best of treatment at cost, which is in many cases, less than 25 percent of what one would spend in Europe or USA. Today on an average, corporate sector hospitals treat over 15 percent foreign patients they treat every year. This number runs into tens of thousands bringing huge much needed foreign exchange that may run into billions of dollars. In 2017, 495,056 patients visited India to seek medical care.

Hospital chains like Apollo, Fortis, Max, Narayan Hridayalaya, Seven Hills, Wockhardt, Medanta, BLK, to name a few are doing a yeoman's service to the nation by attracting patients from across the world and offering medical services equal to best anywhere in world.

The main reason for India's emergence as a preferred destination is the inherent advantage of its healthcare industry. Today, Indian healthcare is being perceived to be at par with global standards. The below mentioned points clarifies the reasons which makes India one of the preferred medical tourism destination:

- The key 'selling points' of the medical tourism industry are its 'cost effectiveness' and its combination with the attractions of tourism. The latter also uses the ploy of selling the 'exotica' of the countries involved as well as the packaging of health care with traditional therapies and treatment methods.
- The available talent base of over 500,000 doctors and seven 700,000 nursing professionals, India can provide Medical and Health care of international standard at comparatively low cost.

- Many surgical procedures are available at one-tenth the cost of those in developed countries and there is no waiting period for elective surgery.
- India has done exceptionally well in the last three years in the tourism sector, with overseas footfalls expanding at near 20% average every year.
- Seeing the huge potential in the sector, the government has also started issuing M (medical) visa to the medical patients, and MX visas to the spouse accompanying him, which are valid for a year.
- The National Accreditation Board for Hospitals (NABH), a body set up to ensure safety and hygiene norms for hospitals, has already started the process of granting accreditation with 70 hospitals in the process of getting approval.
- India now offers the latest techniques such as robotic surgery, and gamma-knife treatment for brain tumors. The efficacy of treatment compares with that in the West, with the death rate from coronary bypasses at 0.8% compared to 2.35% in the US.
- India has one of the largest pharmaceutical industries in the world.
- In India the strong tradition of traditional systems of health care in Kerala, for example, is utilised. Kerala Ayurveda centres have been established at multiple locations in various metro cities, thus highlighting the advantage of Ayurveda in health management.
- Medical tourism is often hailed as a sector where developing countries, such as India, have huge potential due to their comparative advantage based on providing world-class treatment at low prices combined with attractive resorts for convalescence.
- Expatriate Indian doctors having excellent reputation and are found in almost every country.
- Private hospitals argue that medical tourism reverses the brain drain and those health workers, who are migrating to economies where salaries are higher and career opportunities more attractive, will stay in India if they can work in the medical tourism sector.
- Corporate hospitals are coming up in the country with improved facilities, equipment, service standards and better marketing capabilities. India can claim expertise in various medical areas such as cardiac care, joint replacement, dental treatments and cosmetic surgery. Apollo group has tied up with hospitals in Mauritius, Lanka, and managing a hospital in Dubai.

Lacking Side: The Challenges

India will have to project itself as being a holistic medical destination to get an edge over other countries. India offers not just treatment but spiritual and mental healing as well. We need to club together a couple of 'pathies' because we have a very strong base of alternative healing therapies because we have a very strong base of alternative healing therapies like yoga, naturopathy, Ayurveda, etc. We have to look after the lacking side of the coin. Hence,

- There is a need to promote India as the new emerging Medical Value Travel destination abroad. The private and public hospitals need to synergize their efforts to promote

India as the Healthcare destination worldwide. The Healthcare Industry will also have to standardize their processes and make its functioning more transparent and accountable.

But one of the many challenges it faces is to provide good quality, affordable healthcare to all. For this, there is a need to reduce inequalities, imbalances that exist between regions, cities and villages and different socioeconomic groups.

- Patients from the United States and Europe still are relatively rare not only because of the distance they must travel but also, hospital executives acknowledge, because India continues to suffer from an image of poverty and poor hygiene that discourage many patients.
- Medical tourism is often hailed as a sector where developing countries, such as India, have huge potential due to their comparative advantage based on providing world-class treatment at low prices combined with attractive resorts for Health care in India's rural districts is poor, dogged by shortages of trained health workers, a lack of funds and corruption. Many patients resort to quacks or seek no medical care at all, since private practitioners are beyond the means of most convalescence.
- The sight of the country's overcrowded public hospitals, open sewers and garbage-littered streets, poor aviation connectivity, poor road infrastructure and absence of uniform quality standards would unsettle most visitors confidence about public infrastructure standards in India.
- In order for the medical tourism industry to grow there are certain requirements that must be met. One of the premier requirements is the need for high quality health institutions. There is a call for modern infrastructure, world class processes, and contemporary technologies.

Exploiting the Potentialities: The Way Forward

The Indian medical tourism industry is presently at a nascent stage but has an enormous potential for future growth and development. Everyone says health is wealth and even we agree with this saying because if there is no good health, no one can work hard to earn and save something to enjoy the life. With the sky-rocketing cost of health care facilities in developed countries like the US and the UK, developing countries like India is now emerging as a major health care facilitator and a centre for medical tourism for the large populace around the globe.

The reason why health tourism in India is in boom and its necessity involves many factors. An ailment knows no time and people often fall sick of grave diseases when it is undesirable. Forgetting the rich people who can afford any cost, there are people who would like to receive quality health care at lowest cost. So if you can receive same standard medical treatment and can visit some desired tourist destination in visiting places in a lower budget than what you would spend treating yourself in your home city then why not take the advantage of medical tourism in India.

Infrastructure in India is of high standards and is in equal competence with best healthcare establishment in developed countries. One health expert once said that once the doors are

closed you will find yourself in the US. Statistics from medical tourism in India show that the quality of reception and care in specialized hospitals across the country reached U.S. standards and there are medical centers in India itself that provide services that are rare elsewhere.

We can unleash the benefits as

- India is considered the leading country promoting medical tourism and now it is moving into a new area of 'medical outsourcing' where subcontractors provide services to the overburdened medical care systems in western countries.
- Infrastructure/ facilities need to be improved, Staff in attendance needs to be better trained to serve, Image of India needs to be enhanced, and Overall service needs to be improved.
- Uniform price band in major specialties to be made public. This would facilitate foreign patients seeking treatments in India.
- Accreditation of hospitals, undertake international marketing campaign, Establish Indian healthcare as safe & trustworthy, Road shows, exhibitions in targeted countries, Streamline immigration process for medical visitors.
- Develop Joint Ventures with likeminded companies for exchange of expertise & knowledge, Collaboration for training of hospital staff, Indian specialists as consultants abroad etc.
- Development of high quality convalescing homes-good after care, Air capacity allowed to be increased, Patients should not wait for weeks to avail treatment.

Conclusion

Medical tourism is a big source for generating dollars irrespective of varying cost of treatment in different countries as, besides treatment, the consumer of health services has to spend on stay outside hospital for many disease conditions thus helping hotel and food industry. While going back home, the patients and their attendants also like to shop thus they contribute greatly towards the economy.

In short, Medical Tourism not only helps to generate foreign currency, but also is a grand vehicle to market the country to citizens of different countries. The overall satisfying experience provided to the patient and his/her attendants invites and motivates others to travel to the country.

Despite the Medical Tourism in India growing at a fast pace, it still remains a highly unorganized sector where lots of middlemen with little or no knowledge and training to manage patient are playing havoc. A vast majority of middle men are touts, fleecing patients and attendants on every single service required thus causing harm to the visitor both financially and psychologically and despite best of treatment offered by hospital, the visitors does not have overall health/positive experience or they leave in a bad taste.

In summation, we may opine that it is high time to declare the Medical Tourism and Industry in India with well-defined guidelines in order to capitalise the opportunities of this sunrise industry.

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