

MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Despite the economic slowdown, medical tourism in India is the fastest growing segment of tourism industry, according to the market research report "Booming Medical Tourism in India". The report adds that India offers a great potential in the medical tourism industry. Factors such as low cost, scale and range of treatments provided in the country add to its attractiveness as a medical tourism destination. There is a growing potential for India's health care products and medical tourism of late in domestic as well as inbound tourist market. Medical tourism is a blend of tourism and health thereby known as 'health or medical tourism.' It can be broadly defined as 'a provision of 'cost effective' private medical care in collaboration with the tourism industry for patients needing surgical and other forms of specialized treatment. This paper addresses the concept of medical tourism in India and the government strategies for the development of tourism in India. The study is based on secondary data which collected through journals, books and websites.

KEY WORDS: *Medical tourism, government strategies, health care*

INTRODUCTION

The term medical tourism is the act of traveling to other countries to obtain medical, dental and surgical care. Medical tourism (also called medical travel, health tourism or global healthcare) is a term used to describe the rapidly-growing practice of travelling across international borders to seek healthcare services. Services typically sought by travelers include elective procedures as well as complex surgeries etc. India holds advantage as a medical tourism destination due to following factors: Most of the doctors and surgeons at Indian hospitals are trained or have worked at some of the medical institutions in the US, Europe, or other developed nations. Top -of-the-line medical and diagnostic equipment from global international conglomerates is available at many Indian hospitals. Indian nurses are among the best in the world. Nearly 1000 recognized nurses-training centers in India, mostly attached to teaching hospitals, graduate nearly 10,000 nurses annually. Even the most budget-conscious traveler can afford first-rate service and luxury amenities.

According to Goodrich & Goodrich (1987), medical tourism is the attempt to attract tourists by deliberately promoting its health-care services and facilities, in addition to its regular tourist amenities.

Laws (1996) have defined medical tourism as a travel from home to other destination to improve one's health condition as one type of leisure. This includes getting indigenous and alternative medical services, and any other form of tourism undertaken with the purpose of addressing a health concern. . Connell (2006) describes medical tourism as a popular mass culture where people travel to overseas countries to obtain healthcare services and facilities such as medical, dental and surgical care whilst having the opportunity to visit the tourist spots of that country. Carrera and Bridges (2006) have defined medical tourism as travel which is systematically planned to maintain one's physical and mental health condition.

IMPORTANCE

Today, health care is offered as a tourist product in name of medical tourism and every year millions of medical tourists cross the borders of their nations in search of quality treatments at low costs. Indeed the world is experiencing a boom in this industry. There is a growing potential for India's health care products and medical tourism of late in domestic as well as inbound tourist market.

OBJECTIVES

- To study medical tourism in India
- To study the strategies implemented by government to boost medical tourism

MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

Medical Tourism is poised to be the next Indian success story after Information Technology the major service providers in Indian medical tourism are: the Apollo Hospitals, Escorts Hospital, Fortis Hospitals, Breach Candy, Hinduja, Mumbai's Asian Heart Institute, Arvind Eye Hospitals, Manipal Hospitals, Mallya Hospital, Shankara Nethralaya etc. AIIMs, a public -sector hospital is also in the fray. In terms of locations – Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai cater to the maximum number of health tourists and are fast emerging as medical tourism hubs. It also visualizes high-end healthcare services through Indian BPO firms like Hinduja TMT, Apollo Heart Street, Comat Technologies, Datamatics and Lapid that work in the areas of claim adjudication, billing and coding, transcriptions and form processing. One-stop Centre's in key international markets to facilitate patient flow and stream lining immigration for healthcare are

envisaged. The CII, along with Indian Health Care Federation (IHCF), wants to establish an Indian healthcare brand synonymous with safety trust and excellence. Therefore, it is clear that the opportunities and challenges for growth in the health sector are seen primarily within the private/corporate sector, not in the public sector.

Nowadays medical tourism in India includes advanced and life savings health care services like open transplants, cardio vascular surgery, eye treatment , knee/hip different cosmetic surgeries and alternate Systems of medicine. Also leisure aspect medical traveling/wellness tourism may be included on such medical travel trips. India provides a variety of medical services to overseas patients.

Medical tourism is a blend of tourism and health thereby known as 'health or medical tourism.'" It can be broadly defined as 'a provision of 'cost effective' private medical care in collaboration with the tourism industry for patients needing surgical and other forms of specialized treatment. Medical insurance is one of the attractive segments in India. Privatization of health care services has given impetus to fast growth of health care industry. Today a medical tourist bundles his elective treatment with vacation for tropical tourism. A medical tourism product is packaged with alternate traditional therapies like Ayurveda, naturopathy, allopathy, yoga, meditation etc. targeted at High end medical tourists.

MEDICAL TOURISM AS AN INDUSTRY

Medical tourism can be broadly defined as provision of 'cost effective' private medical care in collaboration with the tourism industry for patients needing surgical and other forms of specialized treatment. This process is being facilitated by the corporate sector involved in medical care as well as tourism industry both private and public

In many developing countries it is being actively promoted by the government's official policy. India's National Health policy 2002, for example, says: "To capitalize on the comparative cost advantage enjoyed by domestic health facilities in the secondary and tertiary sector, the policy will encourage the supply of services to patients of foreign origin on payment. The rendering of such services on payment in foreign exchange will be treated as 'deemed exports' and will be made eligible for all fiscal incentives extended to export earnings". The formulation draws from recommendations that the corporate sector has been making in India and specifically from the "Policy Framework for Reforms in Health Care", drafted by the prime minister's Advisory Council on Trade and Industry, headed by Mukesh Ambani and Kumaramangalam Birla.

THE most recent trend in privatization of health services is medical tourism, which is gaining prominence in developing countries. Globalization has promoted a consumerist culture, thereby promoting goods and services that can feed the aspirations arising from this culture. This has had its effect in the health sector too, with the emergence of a private sector that thrives by servicing a small percentage of the population that has the ability to "buy" medical care at the rates at which the "high end" of the private medical sector provides such care. This has changed the character of the medical care sector, with the entry of the corporate sector. Corporate run institutions are seized with the necessity to maximize profits and expand their coverage. These objectives face a constraint in the form of the relatively small size of the population in developing countries that can afford services offered by such institutions. In this background, corporate interests in the Medical Care sector are looking for opportunities that go beyond the limited domestic "market" for high cost medical care. This is the genesis of the "medical tourism" industry.

GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES TO BOOST MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

To boost medical tourism, the government today announced setting up of the National Medical and Wellness Tourism Board to provide help to those visiting the country for health care need.

"The Board, besides Ministry officials, will include other stakeholders such as hospitals, hoteliers, medical experts and tour operators," Tourism Minister Mahesh Sharma said after launching a brochure on yoga, titled 'India-the Land of Yoga'. India is an affordable destination for people looking for best medical care at cost much lower than that of developed countries. This would also give a boost to alternative treatment such as yoga, ayurveda and unani, he said.

- In a KPMG report, released last year, India was placed among the top three medical tourism destinations in Asia (Thailand and Singapore being the other two), mainly due to the low cost of treatment, quality healthcare infrastructure and availability of highly-skilled doctors.
- "These three countries together accounted for about 60 per cent of the total Asian revenue in 2012," the report, Medical Value Travel in India, by global consultancy firm KPMG
- Sharma also launched the second edition of the social awareness campaign films -- 'Atithi Devo Bhava' -- by the Tourism Ministry.
- India and the rest of the world are set to observe June 21 (Sunday) as International Yoga Day, an initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- The Minister also said that the government would set up four more tourism circuits next year which include spirituality, the Ramayan, desert and wildlife.

- **Dedicated exhibition space for Medical Tourism in ITB ,Berlin**

In order to promote the positioning of India as a Medical destination and increase the presence of the medical fraternity in the international travel exhibitions, a dedicated space of 4 sq m. was provided to the medical fraternity within the India Pavillion at ITB Berlin

- **Road shows for promotion of Medical Tourism**

Road shows focusing on Medical Tourism are a continuous process and are organized in consultation with the Stakeholders from time to time. The last road show was organized in West Asia (Dubai, Riyadh, Kuwait and Doha) in October 2009 which was led by the Minister of State for Tourism.

- **Production of Publicity Material**

Brochure, CDs and other publicity materials to promote medical and health tourism have been produced by Ministry of Tourism and have been widely circulated for publicity in Target markets.

- **Fiscal incentives provided by Ministry of Tourism for development of medical Tourism**

SALIENT FEATURES OF MDA FOR MEDICAL TOURISM

For participation in approved Medical and other Tourism Fairs/Medical Conferences/Wellness Fairs and its allied Road Shows Ministry of Tourism provides Market Development Assistance. This scheme was extended to the Medical Tourism Service Providers and Wellness Tourism Service Providers during the year 2009. Financial support under the MDA Scheme is provided to approved medical tourism service providers, i.e. representatives of Hospitals accredited by JCI and NABH and Medical Tourism facilitators

(Travel Agents/ Tour Operators) approved by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and engaged in medical tourism.

CONCLUSION

Tourism industry in India is growing and it has vast potential for generating employment and earning large amount of foreign exchange besides giving a fillip to the country's overall economic and social development. Medical care in the USA and private health care in UK is very expensive. India has well-trained doctors who will work for a lower fee than they could expect abroad. Medical tourism offers people the option of knee replacements, hip replacements, heart care, cosmetic & dental surgery in India. Hundreds of people have treatment abroad, saving them a great deal of money in treatment costs.

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