

Medical Tourism in India, Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract

The fundamental indicator of Medical tourism, when patients travel to distant destinations to obtain better healthcare at economical cost, with tourist attraction. Medical tourism is growing at rate of 19% CAGR from 2023 to subsequent 10 years. In mid-2020, India's medical tourism sector is estimated to be worth US\$5–6 billion. India has not only hospitals with world-class facilities but skilled doctors and paramedical facilities too. Advancement in software industry in India, it has also brought tremendous revolution in health care sector. Medical tourism is major revenue generator for the country.

Keywords: Medical Tourism; Health Care Cost Disparity; Developing Countries

Introduction

Medical tourism termed as Health Tourism or Wellness Tourism or the Cure niche tourism has market which has been rapidly growing in the recent years. 850,000 medical tourists visited India in 2011. The healthcare industry is supported by strong R&D, Device Manufacturers and strong R&D in country where India is lead in development of Biosimilar drugs for various therapeutic disorders at reasonable cost. The number of patients in recent years has increased to over 1.4 Million. The life-threatening coronavirus, the inflow of medical tourists into the India had dipped in 2020, but is slowly starting to gain pace. Maximum patients were from Iran, Iraq, UAE, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan respectively. The major reason is to avail best facilities at relatively low cost. The majority of medical tourists come from the industrialized countries of the world especially Europe, the UK, Middle East, Japan, U.S. and Canada, go to countries like South Korea, Singapore, Latin America or Thailand for various remedies. Malaysia and Thailand are Top destinations in Asia, followed by India. Medical Tourism grows to extent of 25% every year. Medical tourists from Poland, Germany,

Russia, Belarus, Estonia and Finland travel to Spain or Lithuania for Medical procedures.

Cosmetology	Transplant and Replacement Surgery
Therapeutic Interventions	Life Saving Modules: Oncology
Alternative Systems of Medicine	Diagnostic Interventions

Table 1: Division of Medical Tourism.

The medical tourism besides having the bright side can be risky. Medical procedures are not without risk such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C, HIV are not uncommon. Highly drug-resistant bacteria have caused infectious disease outbreaks among medical tourists.

India has introduced a special visa category – an M visa – to cater for the growing number of medical tourists as well as allowing tax breaks to providers.

<p>Strength</p> <p>Large number of beds No Language barrier Quality staff (Paramedic and Medics) Better infrastructure – Airports , Hotels and Medical Centers Promptness in treatment</p>	<p>Opportunity</p> <p>Modern Health Facilities Cost Advantage (Affordable price) One of best medical facilities Corporate Hospitals across country Alternative Medicine</p>
<p>Weakness</p> <p>Strong competition from other countries Under investment in health infrastructure</p>	<p>Threat</p> <p>Travel risks Ethical issues</p>

Table 2: SWOT Analysis of Medical Tourism.

Some of the lead corporate hospitals in India are Apollo group, Escort Group, Fortis Healthcare, Artemis Hospital, Medanta Hospital Delhi, Lilavati Hospital and Hinduja Hospital Mumbai, Choithram Hospital and Research Center, Indore, Pristyn Care, Kochi. These have special cells to cater the foreign medical health seekers.

The different countries have specific expertise, like India for Cardiology and knee surgery, IVF procedures, Brazil for Cosmetic Surgery, Thailand for Dental procedures and Cosmetic surgery, Singapore for Nephrology and Transplantation Medicine and Turkey for Dental procedures, Hair transplant etc. The waiting period in India for intervention is much less than some advanced countries. Further there is no language problem in India as English is well spoken and understood. India also offers advantage in terms of Plastic surgery as compared to western countries. Rhinoplasty, Correction of deviated nasal septum are procedures frequently performed. Botox, Hyaluronic acid injections in Facial aesthetics are main domains and expertise with Indian dermatologists. This is commonly seen in population above 40 years.

Surgery	USA (\$)	KOREA (\$)	INDIA (\$)
Bypass Surgery	130,000	24,000	10,000
Heart Valve Replacement	160,000	36,000	9,000
Angioplasty	57,000	19,600	11,000
Hip Replacement	43,000	16,450	9,000
Hysterectomy	20,000	9,000	3,000
Knee Replacement	40,000	17,800	8,500
Spinal Fusion	62,000	17,350	5,500
Dental Implant	2000-10000	3400	900

Table 3: Cost Metrics of various procedures in USD : The quality of surgery in India is as good performed in USA, but at significantly less cost.

Dental tourism involves root canal treatment, tooth whitening, crowns for damaged tooth, use of dental veneers, and implants at much lower cost and less waiting time for patient. Dental radiography and 6 types of oral X rays can be performed.

The major area of focus for tourism in India is for diseases like diabetes, cancer (diagnosis, radiography and treatment with biosimilars) and intraocular lens implants, retinal surgery.

India’s medical tourism industry could be worth \$9 billion, and will account for 20% of the global market share. Herbal medicine has gained tremendous attention in the management of an assortment of chronic diseases like diabetes, chronic CNS disorders, and different types of cancer. Contribution of traditional medicine is of proven safety, quality, and efficacy, is able to contribute to the goal to ensure the access to healthcare. This has been practiced since ages.

The affordable Medical Tourism companies in India, which coordinate total package for the patient are : MedSurge India, Indicure Health Tours. Sirona Medical Tourism, Credihealth Pvt Ltd, Vaidam Health Pvt Ltd, Obligo Medi Voyage, Medi Country, Midway Medical Tourism etc. dispersed through out India.

Most of the foreign patients (73.5%) felt that India’s medical facilities were “good” in terms of service when compared with other countries, as evident in survey.

Discussion

Medical tourism is a phenomenon rapidly increasing in popularity due to rapid globalization. Government plays vital role of facilitator and ensures separate budget for medical tourism, insurance facility, and resources to attract foreign direct investment. Country like India is still not favored destination globally because of the following:

- Lack of infrastructural facilities like lack of connectivity, lack of coordinating system, poor power supply and poor water supply,
- The hospitals have observed poor hygiene awareness in medical attendants, unhygienic food handling, and lack of proper hospitality services, heterogeneous pricing of services.
- (a) Low accessibility, (b) lack of capital, (c) lack of Community participation and awareness, (d) lack of involvement from rural sector, (e) lack of concern for sustainability, (f) complex visa procedures, (g) lack of good language translators, and (h) Poor airport transfer process.

However, the important fact which attracts Medical tourism in India are:

- Cost Advantage, 1/10th cost for many procedures as compared to Western countries.
- Proficient and well trained Medical and Paramedical Faculty
- Many drugs and devices are tested in India so as to have better patient recruitment and the speed at which the trial is completed.

Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala are Nodes for health tourism in India and have most reputed hospitals in Country. Other states are, Gujrat and Telangana and Delhi. Kerala has pioneered itself for Traditional systems of Medicine [1-23].

Conclusion

Medical tourism in India, focusses on comprehensive research and competitive analysis of medical and surgical procedures and cost analysis. Trained and experienced consultants can impart tremendous benefit to needy travelers who seek medical advice, in diverse field of medical specialities.

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