

Medical Tourism: Growth and Prospects in India

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Abstract

Medical Tourism is an important economic activity and one of the fastest growing sectors globally. This form of tourism can be defined as the process of traveling outside your own country for the purpose of receiving medical care. It has a very significant impact on the healthcare, hospitality and travel industry of a country. It also helps in generating employment, foreign investment and FOREX for a country. This paper is an attempt to explore the growth of this industry in India and the factors behind it.

Keywords: Medical Tourism, Destination, Medical Care, Quality Care, Privacy, Accreditations.

Introduction

Medical tourism refers to travelling to other countries in search of medical treatments. In this people travel in search of more affordable health options encased with tourist attractions. Although the rationale behind seeking medical care is not easy accessibility or availability in the home country, patients have been found to include leisure, fun and relaxation activities as part of their decision (Heung, Kucukusta, and Song, 2010). According to Grandview research, USA. The worldwide medical tourism market size was estimated at USD 44.8 billion in 2019 and is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 21.1 % from 2020 to 2027.

This industry is promoted by multi specialty corporate hospitals in developing countries by providing high quality medical services at cheaper prices to patients from developed countries. This industry is also a great help for the patients of underdeveloped countries, who can afford to travel abroad for treatment due to lack of medical facilities in home countries.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the growth of Medical Tourism in India.
2. To examine the reasons for the growth of this sector in India.

Methodology

This research is primarily based on secondary data. Various sources like books, journals, websites, leading newspapers and government reports were investigated.

In India, medical tourism is the fastest growing segment of tourism industry. Currently India ranks second in the world. Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Costa Rica, Mexico are other leading destinations. India is the most prominent destination as per the medical tourism market report 2015. In October 2015, the value of Indian medical tourism was estimated to be USD 3 billion and it is expected to reach USD 8 billion soon according to a report released by the federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

According to a report "India: Building Best Practices in Healthcare Services Globally 2019", the increasing cost of health in developed countries will make India a cost effective alternative in the coming years. The report also stated that India is one of the desired destinations for Medical Value Travel (MVT).

The 2015 Medical tourism market report found out that India is one of the most cost effective and the best quality provider at about one-fifth to one-tenth cost of similar procedure in United States. Foreign patients traveling to India to seek medical treatment in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 were 1,71,021; 2,36,898; 1,84,298, 2,33,081, 4,27,014 respectively. Medical Tourism in India has seen an exponential growth of 111 percent in the past 3 years from 2015 to 2017. According to Ministry of



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Home Affairs, 4.95 lakh foreign tourists visited India for medical purposes in 2017 a significant change from 2.33 lakh in 2015.

Year	Medical visa
2014	75,688
2015	134,344
2016	427,014
2017	495,056

(Source- Minister of Tourism, KJ Alphonas in an answer in zero hour in Parliament (Jan 29, 2019)

Factors attracting Foreign Patients to India **Competitive cost**

The table below shows the cost of various surgeries in different countries in terms of USD

Medical Treatment	USA	Thailand	Singapore	India
Heart Bypass	144000	24000	13500	8500
Angioplasty	57000	13000	11200	5000
Heart Valve Replacement	170000	11000	12500	9000
Hip Replacement	50000	1200	9200	5800
Hip Resurfacing	50000	16000	12100	8000
Knee Replacement	100000	10000	11000	6200
Spinal Fusion	2000-10000	7000	9000	5500
Dental Implant	30000	3000	2900	700
Lap Band	10000	12000	12000	7500

(Source: Indian Medical Travel Association, IMACS Research,(2016) Medical Tourism Website)

Qualitative Treatment

Indian doctors are famous around the world for their high quality education and training. A lot of them are returnee Indians who have studied abroad, and then there are large hospital groups such as Apollo, which have emerged as large international brands themselves. Availability of high medical quality of cardiovascular surgery, cosmetic surgery, orthopedic surgery and dental surgery in all the leading hospitals with advanced equipments and technologies is one of the key factor that will drive the market. However, more and more of these profit hospitals now are offering signing bonuses, stock options and other incentives to Indian doctors in US to return and practice in India (knox 2008). These Indian doctors bring their specialized training and knowledge from a western country and mix it with their valuable experience. The nurses and other hospital staff are also quite experienced and cooperative. Also Indian nurses are among the best in the world.

Accreditation of Indian Hospitals

Growing conformity towards international standards of medical treatments is the major growth driving factors for medical tourism market in India. Various organizations such as Global healthcare accreditation (GHA) and the Joint commission international (JCI) provides accreditation to hospitals and medical centers after strict quality checks to provide highly efficient treatment to foreign patients. For implementing high quality of medical procedure, various local and international organizations are formulated thereby propelling industry to grow. At present India has 28 JCI accredited hospitals. To build a good image of India as a medical tourist destination and to attract international tourist. Various

A survey by Deloitte centre for Health Solutions(2007) on medical tourism indicates that two in five survey respondents said that they would be interested in pursuing treatment abroad if quality was comparable and the savings were 50 % or more. Patients without borders estimates savings ranging from 40 to 90%, depending on the country opted. In Taiwan, Thailand, Mexico and Turkey patients can save 40 to 65 % on procedures and treatments there are countries like Singapore where patients can save 25 to 45 % on treatments. At the higher end in India the savings can start from 65 and go up to 90% with patients receiving quality care.

foreign investors and pharmaceuticals industries are coming forward to invest in the medical sector.

International Travel made Easy

Ease and affordability of international travel to avail medical services, various packages and discounts offered by airline and travelling companies to medical patients has further added to affordability, thereby boosting the growth of medical travel industry.

Government Initiatives

Ministry of health and Ministry of tourism are trying to make India a more leading medical destination. Government has introduced a special category of 'Medical Visa' for foreign medical tourist who visit India for their medical treatment.

Indian government is launching various schemes and programs to promote health tourism and inviting foreign and private investors to invest in hospitals and accommodation sector.

Ministry of Tourism has conducted a campaign called —Incredible India, to promote Yoga and Meditation/ Wellness Tourism. Indian Government is investing a huge amount on infrastructural development and promotional activities to increase the potential of medical tourism in India.

Waiting Time

In developed countries like US, UK patients have to wait for major surgeries. On the other hand India has no waiting time or very less waiting time for major surgeries once the diagnosis is done.

Language

Despite linguistic diversity in India, English is considered as an official language. Communication becomes easy with foreign patients in India as English is widely spoken here. In case of non english

speaking patients interpreters are provided by most of the multi specialty hospitals.

Privacy

Privacy is also a key factor looked by the patients in the medical facilities available in their home countries but usually fail to find it. Though the degree of secrecy definitely varies from person to person. Many people are willing to keep their healing procedures as secret as possible, especially while undergoing cosmetic surgeries such as liposuction, breast augmentation, face lift etc offered by various medical destinations. Those who want to undergo any of these can opt for a medical tour and obtain the best possible treatments secretly and also at a reasonable price. Even flying across borders is not an issue as far as their information is made not public.

Medical professionals working in the health care organizations at different destinations ensure the utmost privacy of their clients by making use of all those standards of confidentiality. They never disclose personal as well treatment related information of their patients to guarantee the excellent services.

Insurance Coverage

The benefits of the affordable health care services offered at leading medical tourism can be reaped by patients who already have health insurance policies but need to undertake certain medical procedures that their health insurance does not cover.

There are a number of surgical approaches such as orthopedic surgeries (Hip replacement, Hip resurfacing, knee replacement etc.), Cosmetic surgeries like liposuction, tummy tuck, breast augmentation, nose reshaping facelift, botox injections, and dental treatments etc., which do not come under regular health insurance coverage. However at the same time, the demand for these elective surgeries is shooting up at a rapid pace., hence increased number of developing countries have started offering these services to their international patients at remarkable low prices along with optimal care.

Conclusion

Medical tourism industry can act as a powerful agent of both economic and social change. It triggers employment, domestic investment, foreign

investment, and enhances foreign exchange reserves of a country. It is a upcoming industry which is significantly contributing to the foreign exchange earnings and serving as a potential generator of employment opportunities.

India possesses an immense attraction as a tourist destination due to its varied topography and culture. It is capable of becoming a heaven for medical tourists by highlighting holistic treatments like Ayurveda, Yoga, and Naturopathy etc. The emergence of quality care at affordable prices in multi specialty hospitals will undoubtedly boost medical tourism in India. Satisfied medical tourists will recommend India as a preferred destination which will further strive India to become a leader in this industry.

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