Research Paper

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Medical Tourism in India – An Overview

Commerce

KEYWORDS : Medical Tourism, Treatment Cost Comparison, Medical Treatments, Cost Estimation

Dr. D. Geetha — Associate professor, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore-641043.

Ms. A. Karthika — PhD Research Scholar, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women, Coimbatore-641043.

ABSTRACT

Medical tourism can be defined as the provision of 'cost effective' private medical care in collaboration with the tourism industry for patients needing surgical and other forms of specialized treatment. It is the process of traveling outside the country of residence for the purpose of receiving medical treatments. Evolution in the popularity of medical tourism has captured the attention of policy-makers, researchers and the media. Today there are both qualitative and quantitative shifts in patient mobility and people travel from richer to developing countries in order to avail health services. It was initially patients moving from less developed countries to western countries in pursuit of advanced treatments. Such shift is mostly driven by the relatively inexpensive treatments in developing nations, cheaper flight costs, increased marketing and online consumer information about the availability of advanced medical services. This paper identifies the current scenario of medical tourism in India.

INTRODUCTION

Medical tourism or health tourism is the travel of people to another country for the purpose of obtaining medical treatment in that country. With rising health care costs in developed countries like United States and United Kingdom along with rising inflation in these countries, people who cannot afford such an exorbitant health care costs are seeking medical treatments in countries which offer same treatments at a lower cost. Moreover, celebrities, sportsmen & other people from western countries flock to such countries. This has given rise to medical tourism (or medical travel) which has now become a growing sector as it creates lots of job opportunities and adds to the growth of the country. Amongst the countries which offer low cost health care services, India is in prime place. Growth of medical tourism in India has been very rapid in the last 10 years and according to Confederation of Indian Industry over 1, 50, 000 patients have travelled to India to acquire health care services in 2005. It is expected that Indian medical tourism will grow at an exceptional rate of 30% by 2015 and would become a 2billion USD industry (Ministry of Tourism).

MEDICAL TOURISM – REASONS FOR ITS PREFERENCE

The emerging trend of obtaining medical treatment overseas is influenced by several factors. People seek medical treatment in a foreign country because,

- The charges for healthcare treatments in developed nations have increased extremely.
- Today, international travel has become highly uncomplicated, less risk and are priced rationally.
- International quality standards of treatments and technological developments in healthcare industry are improving rapidly throughout the world.
- Improvement in the communication technology opportunities also made it easier to find and access medical centers worldwide.
- Health insurance costs and medical treatment charges seems to be expensive for middle and low income society.
- Medical treatments along with entertainment of recreational activities reduces mental stress with the patient.

Moreover people without a health insurance policy, or with a limited health insurance policy, are more likely to search for other options such as medical tourism. As the cost of healthcare service increases, the series of treatments and procedures that the health insurance policies cover has declined gradually. The deductibles from a person's health insurance may turn out to be more expensive than the price of going overseas for treatment. Hence, the people who simply cannot afford health insurance, choose traveling overseas as an appropriate alternative.

MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA AT A GLANCE

As Indian healthcare sector develops, the emerging trend of 'Medical Tourism', has invited people from all corners of the world to visit India for seeking medical and relaxation treatments. Many critical surgeries are also done, some of the common treatments include heart surgery, eye surgeries, knee transplantation, cosmetic surgery and dental care. Medical tourists choose India as their favorable destination because of the key opportunities in Indian healthcare sector in the form of efficient infrastructures, technology and professional expertise of specialists and medical personnel (doctors). The health insurance industry and medical systems prevailing in India has developed widely, attracts huge medical tourists from the Western and the Middle East countries. They also find the travelling and medical expenses to be affordable. The healthcare industry overview shows that the medical infrastructure and technology in this country is in par with those in USA, UK and Europe. The advancements in India kindled it to compete with some of its best hospitals and treatment centers with the world, and therefore make it a favorable medical destination.

The medical tourism industry in India is highly unorganized but there exists good infra-structure, highly skilled medical practitioners and low cost health services at its credit. India offers world-class healthcare that costs substantially less than those in developed countries, using the same technology delivered by competent specialists attaining similar success rates. For instance, if a liver transplant costs in the range of 137,867 US$ - 160,845 US$ in Europe and double that in the US, a few Indian hospitals have the resources to do it in around 34,466 US$ - 45,955 US$. Similarly, if a heart surgery in the US costs about 45,955 US$, a leading Indian hospital will do it for approximately 4,595 US$.

TABLE -1 TREATMENT COST COMPARISON AMONG DIFFERENT NATIONS FOR THE YEAR (2014)

Procedures	US	Costa Rica	India	Korea	Mexico	Thailand	Malaysia
Heart Bypass	$144,000	$25,000	**$5,200**	$28,900	$27,000	$15,121	$11,430
Angioplasty	$57,000	$13,000	**$3,300**	$15,200	$12,500	$3,788	$5,430
Heart Valve Replacement	$170,000	$30,000	**$5,500**	$43,500	$18,000	$21,212	$10,580
Hip Replacement	$50,000	$12,500	**$7,000**	$14,120	$13,000	$7,879	$7,500
Hip Resurfacing	$50,000	$12,500	**$7,000**	$15,600	$15,000	$15,152	$12,350
Knee Replacement	$50,000	$11,500	**$6,200**	$19,800	$12,000	$12,297	$7,000
Spinal Fusion	$100,000	$11,500	**$6,500**	$15,400	$12,000	$9,091	$6,000
Dental Implant	$2,800	$900	**$1,000**	$4,200	$1,800	$3,636	$345
Lap Band	$30,000	$8,500	**$3,000**	N/A	$6,500	$11,515	N/A
Breast Implants	$10,000	$3,800	**$3,500**	$12,500	$3,500	$2,727	N/A
Rhinoplasty	$8,000	$4,500	**$4,000**	$5,000	$3,500	$3,901	$1,293
Face Lift	$15,000	$6,000	**$4,000**	$15,300	$4,900	$3,697	$3,440
Hysterectomy	$15,000	$5,700	**$2,500**	$11,000	$5,800	$2,727	$5,250
Gastric Sleeve	$28,700	$10,500	**$5,000**	N/A	$9,995	$13,636	N/A
Gastric Bypass	$32,972	$12,500	**$5,000**	N/A	$10,950	$16,667	$9,450
Liposuction	$9,000	$3,900	**$2,800**	N/A	$2,800	$2,303	$2,299
Tummy Tuck	$9,750	$5,300	**$3,000**	N/A	$4,025	$5,000	N/A
Lasik (both eyes)	$4,400	$1,800	**$500**	$6,000	$1,995	$1,818	$477
Cornea (both eyes)	N/A	$4,200	**N/A**	$7,000	N/A	$1,800	N/A
Retina	N/A	$4,500	**$850**	$10,200	$3,500	$4,242	$3,000
IVF Treatment	N/A	$2,800	**$3,250**	$2,180	$3,950	$9,091	$3,819

N/A – Not Available

Source: Reports from www.medicalindiatourism.com for the year 2014

ADVANTAGES OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

Medical tourism is one of the quickest and largest growing industries in the world. India is considered among the best in international medical tourism destinations. Patients get excellent healthcare services in Allopathic, AYUSH and other nature treatments in India. Many foreign medical tourists have the fear about the quality of medical facilities and treatments they will receive out of the country. There are many highly qualified doctors and hospitals with excellent infrastructure in India. Medical procedures often cost half as much (or less) in India as compared to the U.S. Even including the travelling cost, food and accommodation, are cheaper to have procedures done out of the motherland than to have them done at home country. The Indian medicine system is over 5000 years old and there are a wide range of exceptional medical treatment packages accessible in India at a very reasonable price. All the hospitals in India offer advanced medical technologies and health care facilities by applying the same professional medical knowledge and technology at a substantially lower price. Doctors in India are well trained and experienced, multi-lingual, with quite a lot of them having undergone professional training in US and from other developed nations.

Some of the other advantages include –

- Internationally accredited medical facilities using the latest technologies
- Treatment-cum-leisure destination and availability of advanced devices
- Highly qualified Physicians/Surgeons and paramedical staff
- Significant cost savings compared to domestic private healthcare
- Medical treatment costs in India are comparatively lower by around 60-80% for similar procedures in North America and the UK
- No waiting period for treatment or a very short period

MEDICAL SERVICES AVAILABLE IN INDIA

The most well-known medical services that are growing at a faster rate in India and are also included as a part of medical tourism advantages. Some of the treatments are –

- Eye , Ear, nose and throat (ENT) surgeries
- Neuro and Spine surgeries, Urology, Cardiology surgeries
- All types of bone and joints treatments – Orthopedics surgery
- Cosmetic surgeries - Laser hair removal treatments, Hair implants and treatments
- Spa and beauty treatments, Dental treatments
- Blood vessel treatments, Stomach related treatments, Multi organ transplantations
- Heart related treatments and surgeries, Infertility Treatments
- Ayurveda treatments and therapies

Some of these surgeries are even done as 'Robotic Surgery', which has many advantages like accuracy, expertise, cost-effective, smaller incisions, less scar, less pain, lower loss of blood, less risk of infection, faster recovery, short hospital stay, etc.

Awareness about nature cure methods, peoples' interest and need to cure some incurable diseases permanently or to extend the survival period of those patients, people go for alternative methods of treatment. India also offers nature oriented methods of alternative treatments that include –

- Meditation and Yoga
- Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani
- Music Therapy, Fasting Therapy
- Homeopathy, Aroma Therapy, Pranic Healing, Reiki
- Acupressure, Acupuncture, Psychotherapy, Physiotherapy
- Hydrotherapy, Electropathy

ADVANCED TREATMENT TECHNOLOGIES AND COST ESTIMATION IN INDIA

India has gained a lot of popularity in the field of medical tourism from the past few years and witnesses an enormous number of medical tourist arrival from all over the world. Because of the continuing traditional expertise in medicine, India has adopted the most **Advanced Medical Treatment Technology** for a number of services and products. Patients can avail the best of medical services at remarkably lower charges for a number of treatments including Robotic Surgery for prostate cancer, Gamma Knife Radiosurgery, HIFU treatment, **Minimally-invasive surgery** for heart diseases, Computed Tomography Scan (CT or CAT Scan), Orthopaedic surgeries like knee replacement surgery, infertility treatments and more.

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TABLE -2 COST ESTIMATION FOR ADVANCED TREATMENTS

Treatment Procedure	Days in Hospital	Procedure Cost (USD)	Procedure Cost (INR)
Robotic Prostate Cancer Surgery	Depends upon the treatment	9000	540000
Robotic Heart Surgery	4-7 days	12000 to 15000	720000 to 900000
Brain Tumor Treatment	2- 5 days	6500 to 8500	390000 to 510000
Bone Marrow Transplant	Depend on the type of bone marrow transplant	40000 to 50000	2400000 to 3000000
Cyberknife Radiosurgery Treatment PET Scan, MRI and other required tests	2	800	48000
Cyberknife Radiosurgery	Depends upon the treatment	10000	600000
Gammaknife Radiosurgery	Depends upon the treatment	7800	468000
HIFU Treatment for Prostate Cancer	Depends upon the treatment	9800	588000
Advanced Intra Operative MRI Assisted Brain Tumor Surgery	4-7 days	8000 to 8500	480000 to 510000

Source: www.medicalindiatourism.com

The charges mentioned in the above packages are just an estimate based on the primary information collected from the respective hospitals and are subject to change, depending on the medical problem and condition of the patient.

DRAWBACKS OF MEDICAL TOURISM

There are also some drawbacks in the medical tourism which forms the reason for hesitation of some people to travel foreign countries for medical treatments. Some of the reasons are as follows:

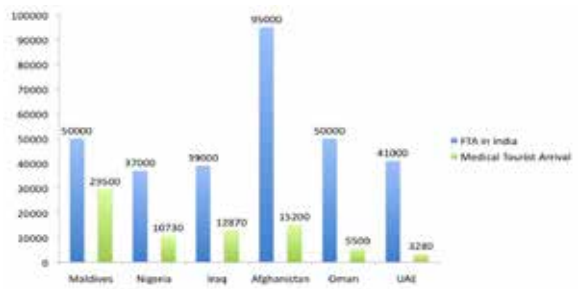
- The legal framework and permits can be tedious which may serve as a hindrance for medical tourists and unaware legal formalities in a foreign country can also undermine their medical care travel.
- The cultural and language barrier can also become hurdle for medical tourists as they may find it difficult to communicate with healthcare professionals and local people at their visit.
- There are some incidents where a patient is promised of high-quality medical services but has received inefficient medical treatment. Any hidden cost or kind of misinformation in the treatment or cost could demolish the entire advantage of foreign medical visit.
- The post-operative care would be minimum and limited as mostly the hospitals rush up with the treatments and release them quickly carries least post-operative care. This might result in serious complications with the operated patient.

MEDICAL TOURIST ARRIVAL IN INDIA

Because of the emergence of private sector and the introduction of new technologies in medicine, there is a greater access of international patients into India as medical tourists. Private medical centres, private polyclinics, private medical practitioners contributes an 80 percent share in India's total health expenditure. Currently, the size of the medical tourism industry in India in value terms is estimated at a little over $3billion, with tourist arrivals estimated at 230,000.

According to the reports of Punjab Haryana Delhi (PHD) Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Indian medical tourism industry was expected to reach $6billion (around Rs.36,000 billion) by 2018, with the quantum of medical tourist arrival into the country would be double by the next four years. The citizens of countries who visit India for Medical purposes during the year 2013 are mainly from Maldives (59% of 50,000 visitors), Nigeria (29% of 37000 visitors), Iraq (33% of 39000 visitors), Afghanistan (16% of 95000 visitors), Oman (11% of 50000 visitors), and UAE (8% of 41000 visitors).

CHART -1 NUMBER OF MEDICAL TOURIST ARRIVAL IN INDIA



Source: Reported by Dr. Govind Saxena Trustee-cum-Secretary, Delhi Heritage Foundation 2013

MEDICAL TOURISM ASSOCIATION SURVEY REPORT 2013

The key findings of the medical tourism association survey report 2013 are,

- Cost economy was the leading factor which attracts 80% of medical tourist. Among medical treatments, cosmetic surgery covers 38% of demand. The total expense of 92% patient for a medical tour was almost less than $30,000.
- Medical tourists expended between $7,475 and $15,833 per medical travel trip. For 6 million patients, medical travel may contribute $45 - $95 billion to global GDP.
- Latin America and Asia are the two leading regions where people are likely to prefer medical travel. Mexico and India were the countries that acquires highest demand for medical tourism.
- It was predicted that around 76% of American patients would be interested in medical travel in future.

MEASURES TAKEN BY MINISTRY OF TOURISM TO PROMOTE MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

According to a recent report of RNCOS, Indian Medical Tourism Industry is expected to attain a CAGR of more than 20% during 2013-2015. The Ministry of Tourism has taken several steps to promote India as a feasible region for Medical and Health Tourism, which includes,

- Indian Healthcare Federation, a Non-Governmental organization affiliated to the Confederation of Indian Industry, on advice by Government, has prepared a guide on select Indian hospitals of the country for health tourism purposes. It has been placed on the Website of the Ministry of Tourism i.e. www.incredibleindia.org for wider publicity.
- The Ministry of Tourism had promoted Medical and Health tourism through issuing of brochures, CDs and other publicity materials consisting of the benefits and facilities available for foreign patients in target markets.
- Medical and health tourism has been specifically promoted at various international platforms such as World Travel Mart, London, and ITP Berlin.
- Financial assistance are provided to service providers under the Market Development assistance scheme introduced by the ministry of tourism.
- A new category of Mvisa and MXvisa (Medical Visa) have been introduced, which will be given for foreign travelers coming to India for medical treatment.

- Guidelines for national and international accreditation of Ayurvedic and Panchkarma Centres have been circulated to all State Governments for implementation. These have been placed on the website of Ministry of Tourism i.e. www.incredibleindia.org for wider publicity.
- Yoga/Ayurveda/Wellness has been promoted over the current decade in the print, electronic, internet and outdoor medium under the Ministry of Tourism's "Incredible India Campaign".
- Brochures & CDs on Body, Mind and Soul covering the traditional system of natural medicine have been produced and circulated extensively by the Ministry of Tourism in order to promote various natural therapies.

CONCLUSION

The concept of medical tourism is appealing to anyone who is interested in high quality and affordable healthcare. The medical tourism phenomenon is gaining popularity and the number of people going abroad for treatment increases rapidly every year. India is a huge magnet for attracting foreign patients for medical treatments. It is a good source of foreign exchange as well as creates reputation and good image in the minds of people belonging to developed nations. With general tourism on the rise, it is estimated that the volume of medical tourists worldwide could reach up to 5 million by 2016, attracting additional visitors to the country. With many medical tourism benefits, advancements in technology and improvements in healthcare standards within developing countries, it is likely that the advantages of medical tourism will provide a striking economical solution to many healthcare problems. The Indian medical tourism with the best infrastructure, the best possible Medical facilities, accompanied with the most economical prices is really a favorable destination for health tourism enjoying treatment and leisure together.

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