



Medical Tourism :- A Developing Concept

Mrs. Soumya
Sonalika

Lecturer, Dept. of Community Health Nursing, Lord Jagannath Mission's
College of Nursing, Mancheswar, Bhubaneswar, Odisha

ABSTRACT

Medical tourism, broadly health and wellness tourism, refers to the industry in which people from across the globe travel to other countries to get medical, dental and surgical care and at the same time visit the local attractions of that country. India is known for cost-effective medical treatments.

KEYWORDS : Medical tourism, Travel, Cost-effective treatment

INTRODUCTION

Over 50 countries have identified medical tourism as a national industry. Medical tourism definitely adds itself to the top-line of the various healthcare institutions. Even though the revenue model is volume-dependent, the capacity and quality of care is enough to ensure healthy profit margins at reduced rates.

WHAT IS MEDICAL TOURISM?

Medical tourism is a term applied to the process where people from all around the world travel to foreign countries to obtain medical, dental and surgical care. At the same time, it is a tour, a vacation and an experience of visiting them.

Medical tourism differs from the traditional model of international medical travel where patients generally journey from less developed nations to major medical centres in highly developed countries for medical treatment that is unavailable in their own communities.

HISTORY

The first recorded instance of medical tourism dates back thousands of years to when Greek pilgrims travelled from all over the Mediterranean to the small territory in the Saronic Gulf called Epidauria. This territory was the sanctuary of the healing god Asklepios. Epidauria became the original travel destination for medical tourism.

THE CONCEPT

Cost of medical treatment equals a tour to surrounding tourist destination + medical treatment + savings.

Treatment cost in developing countries is only one fifth and sometimes even a tenth of the cost in the west/ other countries.

Quality

Large pool of doctors, nurses & paramedics

- Strength:
- Over 650,000 doctors;
 - Highly skilled experts,
 - Possess English speaking skills

Comfort Level

- NRI doctors recognized as amongst best in adopted countries (First World)
- Usage of English
- Nurses increasingly getting international exposure

Value Proposition

Quality medical services at 1/10th costs:-

- Complicated surgical procedures possible at 1/10th the cost
- Increase in use of Computerized Hospital Information Systems
- Software technologists facilitating tech revolution in healthcare
- State-of-the-art medical establishments of great repute

Lower Medication cost:

- Strong Pharma Sector and gaining world recognition
- Fast emerging as major Drug R&D Center
- Strong Generic drugs business
- Low cost of drug development

No waiting

Tourist Interest:

- 5000 year old civilization
- Renowned for Historical, Cultural and Religious diversity
- Diverse geographical landmarks; vast coastline
- Traditional arts and crafts
- Vibrant democracy: Freedom for citizens; empowered women population

Alternative Medicine Proposition:

- Ancient Ayurvedic stream of medicines
- Rejuvenation alternatives: health retreats
- Naturopathy and Yoga

Consultancy service by utilizing telemedicine concept.

Factors that drive demand for medical services abroad in First World countries include: large populations, comparatively high wealth, the high expense of health care or lack of health care options locally, and increasingly high expectations of their populations with respect to health care.

A specialized subset of medical tourism is **reproductive tourism or Fertility tourism** and **reproductive outsourcing**, which is the practice of travelling abroad to undergo in-vitro fertilization, donor insemination, surrogate pregnancy and other assisted reproductive technology treatments including freezing embryos for retro-production. The main reasons for fertility tourism are legal regulation of the sought procedure in the home country, or lower price.

Health tourism providers have developed as intermediaries to unite potential medical tourists with provider hospitals and other organisations. Companies that focus on medical value travel typically provide nurse case managers to assist patients with pre- and post-travel medical issues. They also help provide resources for follow-up care upon the patient's return.

ACCREDITATION/CERTIFICATION

International healthcare accreditation is the process of certifying a level of quality for healthcare providers and programs across multiple countries. International healthcare accreditation organizations certify a wide range of healthcare programs such as hospitals, primary care centers, medical transport, and ambulatory care services.

Many international hospitals today see obtaining international accreditation as a way to attract American patients.

THE MEDICAL TOURIST

The medical tourist are of 2 types. They are as follows:-

Domestic medical tourist :- Patients within the country. They come because of security reasons, qualified doctors and cost factors.

International medical tourist :- Patients from outside the country such as Middle East and South Asian economies, Afro-Asian patients, UK, USA . They come because in the US- High cost, insufficient insurance cover, in UK- Long waiting time and in Gulf countries- Lack of

advanced treatment facilities.

OFFERS PROVIDED

- **HEART:** Coronary angioplasty, Coronary artery bypass graft, Heart valve repair/replacement, correction of congenital abnormalities
- **EYE:** Cataract and refractive and vitreo- retinal surgeries, corrective surgery for glaucoma.
- **SKIN:** Treatment of vitiligo, botulium toxic treatment for facial wrinkles.
- **EAR, NOSE and THROAT:** Restoration of Hearing, Nose Reshaping, Sinus Surgery, Snoring and Obstructive Sleep Apnea, Laryngeal Cancer.
- **TEETH:** Ceramic Crowns and Bridges, Teeth Whitening, Implantation and Root Canal Therapy
- **JOINTS:** Joint Replacement Surgery, Hip Joint Resurfacing, Arthroscopic Surgery.
- **INFERTILITY:** Assisted reproduction.
- **TRANSPLANTATION:** Kidney, liver, bone marrow, peripheral stem cell.
- **COSMETIC SURGERIES:** Face lift, Breast Augmentation/ Reduction, Waist Reduction, Liposuction
- **TRADITIONAL THERAPIES AND TREATMENT:** Ayurveda, Yoga, naturopathy

MEDICAL TOURISM PROCESS

The typical process is as follows: the person seeking medical treatment abroad contacts a medical tourism provider. The provider usually requires the patient to provide a medical report, including the nature of ailment, local doctor's opinion, medical history, and diagnosis, and may request additional information. Certified medical doctors or consultants then advise on the medical treatment. The approximate expenditure, choice of hospitals and tourist destinations, and duration of stay, etc., is discussed. After signing consent bonds and agreements, the patient is given recommendation letters for a medical visa, to be procured from the concerned embassy. The patient travels to the destination country, where the medical tourism provider assigns a case executive, who takes care of the patient's accommodation, treatment and any other form of care. Once the treatment is done, the patient can remain in the tourist destination or return home.

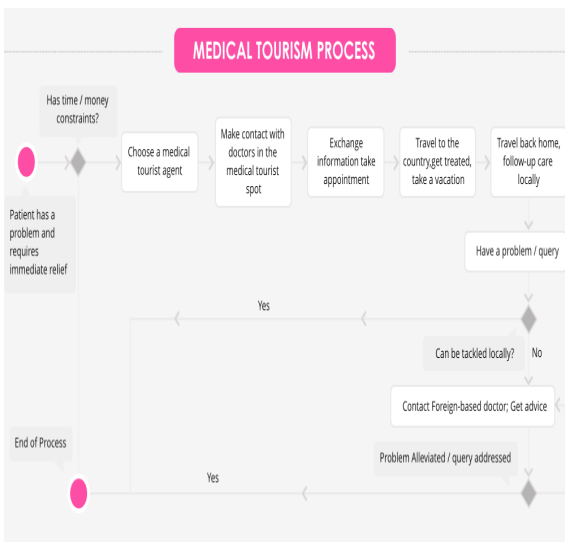


Fig 1:- Medical tourism process

RISKS

Exposure to diseases:- Medical tourism carries some risks that locally-provided medical care does not. Some countries, such as India, Malaysia have different infectious disease-related epidemiology to Europe. Exposure to diseases without having built up natural immunity can be a hazard for weakened individuals, specifically with respect to gastrointestinal diseases (e.g. Hepatitis A, amoebic dysentery, paratyphoid) which could weaken progress and expose the patient to mosquito-transmitted diseases, influenza, and pulmonary tuberculosis.

Post-Operative care:- The quality of post-operative care can also vary dramatically, depending on the hospital and country. Long flights and decreased mobility associated with window seats can predispose one towards developing DVT and potentially a pulmonary embolism.

Patient safety policy:- Health facilities treating medical tourists may lack an adequate complaints policy to deal appropriately and fairly with complaints made by dissatisfied patients. In 2004 WHO launched the World Alliance for Patient Safety. This body assists hospitals and government around the world in setting patient safety policy and practices.

Limited contact:- Finally, after returning home, a patient will have limited contact with his or her surgeon. If and when he requires any follow-up evaluation and advice for the actual treatment received, he is left to rely on telecommunication.

Nursing staff:- Understaffing and the use of overworked and fatigued nursing staff, is a common problem in most of the hospitals which may make the quality of care of the touring patients poor.

LEGAL ISSUES

While some countries currently presenting themselves as attractive medical tourism destinations provide some form of legal remedies for medical malpractice, these legal avenues may be unappealing to the medical tourist. Hospitals and/or doctors in some countries may be unable to pay the financial damages awarded by a court to a patient who has sued them, owing to the hospital.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Medical tourism may raise broader ethical issues for the countries in which it is promoted. Medical tourism centred on new technologies, such as stem cell treatments, is often criticized on grounds of fraud, blatant lack of scientific rationale and patient safety. However, when pioneering advanced technologies, such as providing 'unproven' therapies to patients outside of regular clinical trials, it is often challenging to differentiate between acceptable medical innovation and unacceptable patient exploitation.

Challenges to patient mobility and health tourism

The increasing mobility and the growth of global health tourism present a number of challenges. Firstly, standards are important as far as healthcare is concerned and issues concerning international health accreditation, evidence-based medicine and quality assurance need to be addressed. The right to safety and quality care is an essential element for all patients.

INDIA - A PREFERRED DESTINATION FOR MEDICAL TOURISM

India is placed among the top three medical tourism destinations in Asia. Medical tourism is a growing sector in India, it is estimated that the volume of medical tourists worldwide could reach up to 5 million by 2016, attracting additional visitors to the country.

Most estimates claim treatment costs in India start at around a tenth of the price of comparable treatment in America or Britain. In general patients can save about 70-90% compared to the American hospitals. The reduced cost need not necessarily translate into poor quality. As a matter of fact, many hospitals are JCI accredited. These international accreditations make the hospitals safer and provides peace of mind to the medical tourists planning their medical tourism.

The city of Chennai has been termed **India's health capital**. Multi- and super-specialty hospitals across the city bring in an estimated 150 international patients every day. Chennai attracts about 45 percent of health tourists from abroad arriving in the country and 30 to 40 percent of domestic health tourists.

Healthcare and Hospitals in India - Key Benefits

- High Quality World Class Medical Care
- Economical and Affordable Pricing
- Use of World Class Implants and Consumables
- Zero Wait Times for Surgeries
- Internationally recognized Healthcare professionals.
- Holistic Medicinal Services

- Fluent English Speaking hospital staff
- Exotic Tourist Destination



Fig 2:- Benefits of preferring India

BARRIERS TO OVRCOME

- Standardization and Accreditation.
- Insurance Coverage.
- Immigration and Visa Facilities.
- Proper co-ordination between medical fraternity and travel industry.
- Better infrastructure.

MARKETING ACTIVITIES FOLLOWED

- Tie up with tour operators.
- Promotion in the form of treatment packages.
- Tie up with multinational insurance companies.
- Accreditation of hospital by foreign agencies.
- Seminars and exhibition.

COUNTRIES PROMOTING HEALTH TOURISM

Popular medical travel destinations worldwide include: India, Brunei, Cuba, Colombia, Hong Kong, Hungary, Jordan, Lithuania, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Thailand and recently, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Tunisia and New Zealand. On the other hand, much sought after cosmetic surgery travel destinations include: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico and Turkey. Colombia also provides advanced care in cardiovascular and transplant surgery. Countries such as Poland, Hungary and Slovenia offer competitive dental tourism packages particularly to British, German, Austrian and Swiss nationals who can take advantage of budget air travel and cut costs.

CONCLUSION

Trends clearly point to a continued expansion of medical tourism in the coming years. However, there is an urgent need to be aware of the risks involved and the legal implications resulting from medical complications that may arise on the patient’s return to home. Furthermore, international standards of quality assurance and health accreditation need to be established to protect citizens worldwide and ensure them their rights to the best healthcare possible at the most competitive prices.

REFERENCES

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medical_tourism/ | 2. www.cdc.gov/features/medicaltourism/ | 3. www.medicaltourisminindia.org/ | 4. timesofindia.indiatimes.com | 5. www.artbaby.in | 6. Bhalla G.B(2011), "Nightingale Nursing Times", Health Tourism, Vol 5, No 4, July, Pp 42-44 |