



Innovative Strategies For Enhancing the Image of India in Medical Tourism

KEYWORDS

Health consumer, one-stop medical tourism facilitator, medicines, air ambulance, doctor shopping, medical mall.

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ABSTRACT

The promotion of medical tourism advances the view that medicine and the healthcare can be treated in same the way as other goods and services as traded in the open market. The unabased use of the term "health consumer" being merely one indication of this understanding, where health can be understood as a "thing" to be consumed. Medical tourism is poised to be the next Indian success story after Information Technology. A few innovative strategies will enable India to go a long way in availing the opportunity. Some such strategies are:

- There is a need for a separate agency called Medical Tourism Facilitator to receive, guide and help the medical tourists.
- The government should step into the role of a regulator and facilitator of investments in healthcare with overseas partners and establishment of medicines in India.
- The existing development model of public private partnerships in power and transport sectors which have proved to be successful could be emulated for building global standard healthcare institutions also.
- Separate academic courses on patient management should be introduced in Medical Institutions to train Doctors, Nurses and Paramedical staffs.
- Implementation of IT must be done without considering return on investment.
- To keep away from traffic snarl in Indian highways and as a quick means of transport of patients air ambulance is the need of the hour.
- Just like a commercial mall if a medical mall is organized, then we can have all medical specialist in one location, which will enable the patients to do "doctor shopping".
- Network of accredited hospitals across the world will enhance the service quality in medical tourism.
- Accreditation by National Accreditation Board for Hospital and Healthcare providers (NABH) will improve standards and patient care in hospitals.

One estimate by Price Water house coopers projects that the Indian healthcare sectors should be worth about 45 billion dollar by 2015 will justify the collaborative effort between various stake holders in following the above mentioned strategies.

Introduction

Today diseases are a part of everybody's existence. Everyone continue to battle for living a healthy life. In this quest for existence, distance is a small hurdle and matters least when it comes to resurgence from imminent facilities. Hence travelling to foreign countries for healthcare purposes has been and is predicted to be a rising trend across all sectors. Normally known as medical tourism the tour is also termed as medical travel and medical vacation etc.

The promotion of medical tourism advances the view that medicine and healthcare can be treated in the same way as other goods and services as traded in the open market. The unabased use of the term "health consumer" being merely one indication of this understanding, where health can be understood as a 'thing' to be consumed.

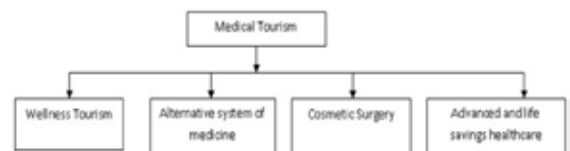
Social benefits and opportunities

Medical tourism is poised to be the next Indian success story after Information Technology. Medical tourism offers tremendous opportunity to the society and the nation in various ways. When medical tourism increases the public and private undertaking will have the new responsibility of creating new and additional infrastructure facilities at global standard resulting in new employment opportunities and overall wealth creation. Such opportunities are not fully utilized by India as we lack in certain areas of quality. A few innovative strategies will enable India to go a long way in availing the opportunities. Some such strategies are enumerated below

1. Medical tourism facilitator

People coming to India for medical treatment are not sufficiently guided. Hence there is a need for a separate agency to receive guide and help the medical tourists at major cities. People coming for medical treatment spend their convalescing period on tourism especially of historical and natural attractions. When they stay here during this period they have to necessarily purchase the medicine which enables the development of pharmaceutical industries. All these creates new opportunities and specialization for new professionals called one – stop medical tourism facilitator who are a team of professionals who will educate the foreign patients on the following:

a. Medical tourism structure in India



b. Cost Comparison in US Dollars

Procedure	US	India	Thailand	Singapore
Heart by pass	1,30,000	10,000	11,000	18,500
Heart valve replacement	1,60,00	9,000	10,000	12,500

Angio-plasty	57,000	11,000	13,000	13,000
Hip re-placement	43,000	9,000	12,000	12,000
Hysterec-tomy	20,000	3,000	4,000	6,000
Knee re-placement	40,000	8,500	10,000	13,000
Spiral fu-sion	62,000	5,500	7,000	9,000

The tourism facilitator has to communicate the cost structure to the people across the world so that the patients can exercise appropriate option.

2. Role of GOI in promoting India – brand

India is emerging as an alternative affordable destination for healthcare. But there are some challenges that the country has to overcome to become a tourist destination with competent healthcare industry. The Government should step into the role of a regulator and a facilitator of private investment in healthcare. An apex body for the industry needs to be formed to promote the India brand abroad and aid intersectoral coordination. Joint ventures with overseas partners and establishment of medicities will help in India building a significant advantages and leadership position in the industry.

3. Public private partnership

Either public and private sector alone cannot cope up with enormous needs of the booming medical tourism industry and hence there is ample scope for public private partnership. Currently such PPP projects are undertaken in power and transport sectors which have proved to be successful. We could emulate the same model for building global standard healthcare institution also.

Currently the medical equipment industry is around \$2.2 billion and is growing at 15% per year. It is estimated to reach \$ 5 billion by 2014. Hence it is the key area for forging partnerships across borders.

In addition to this, engineering excellence, cost effective labor, increasing emphasis on intellectual property rights and most importantly a fast growing domestic markets make India an ideal manufacturing base of the medical services of global standards.

4. HRD in medical tourism

Indians are the best in the world in caring, sharing and loving which are very essentials during the convalescing period of the patient. In addition fluent English speaking professionals are sufficiently available in India. To develop these existing resources, we need separate courses on medical tourism for doctors, nurses and other paramedical staffs so that the international patient gains confidence on the competency of the medical personnel attending on them.

5. IT in medical care

IT in healthcare in India is still at nascent stage even though opportunity in implementing IT in medical can is huge. IT implementation is very slow because every hospital seek returns on investment for every new equipment or IT implementation. The GOI has to consider the feasibility of awarding certain concessions, subsidies, liberal loans etc to ensure quick IT Implementation to tap the potentials of medical tourists towards India.

6. Extend support/ subsidy for healthcare infrastructure

- Healthcare Insurance.
- Vast selection of tourism get away.
- Varied choices of travelling.
- Unlimited options of hospitable lodging.
- Loans and comfortable payback schemes.
- Abundant foreign currency exchange centres.
- Painless international banking procedures India has to

ensure all the above to attract medical tourists. The above lists are not exhaustive but are some of the supporting infrastructure.

7. Air ambulance

All Indian metro cities where most of the global standard hospitals are located are congested and often experiencing traffic snarl. Hence a special transport to move the patient from airport to hospital is very essential to save time and relieve pain to the patients. Fire and ambulance wing of the Government department could consider implementing this strategy to gain confidence of the international patient on arrival.

8. Doctor shopping & medical mall

Healthcare has economically become a commodity now which can be purchased from the medical institution at the choice of the patient, who will have the liberty to choose the doctor. This could be termed as "doctor shopping". Just like the commercial malls, if a medical mall is organized, then in one location we can have all specialists in many nos and all testing laboratories nearby, the shopping becomes feasible & attractive to the patients. Slowly this can be extended to the concept of medicity where 100% facilities will be available in one location itself.

9. Networking of accredited hospitals across the globe

Networking of hospitals across the globe will be convenient to the patients. Currently the results on various medical parameters of a patient issued by one institution is not accepted by others. If biometric identity is issued to patients on a global scale and the hospitals function on the network with other hospitals of the globe, the patient need not undergo tests at every hospital/laboratory.

10. Hospital accreditation will boost medical tourism

Medical tourism in the country will receive a fillip, if hospitals go in for accreditation

- Giridhar j Gyani, Advisor, National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers.

- In India around 150 hospitals were accredited so far. Accreditation is an indication to the medical tourists to have confidence in taking treatment in these hospitals. They feel secured, perceive high quality of healthcare from these hospitals. Under the circumstance the accreditation will attract more patients across the globe to avail quality medical care.
- The quality of medical care is not governed by the infrastructures like buildings & equipments but depends on safety & security of the patients.
- The personnel managers of the hospitals should train the nurses and paramedical staffs on the quality constraints of NABH so that the employee play a major role in acquiring accreditation and understands the standards and protocols of NABH clearly which ultimately gains confidence from patients.
- There could also be arrangements by the Government to allow the local Government medical institution to work on tie-up arrangements with NABH accreditation will be benefitted from the revenue from medical tourism by the accredited hospitals
- "Since the introduction of the protocols, by NABH, the incidences of bedsores and infection from accredited hospitals have come down. This is important because the percentage of persons who get infected from hospitals is quite high in India"

-Dr Nalla Palanisamy Chairman, KMCH, Coimbatore.

Conclusion

One estimate by pricewaterhouse coopers projects that the Indian healthcare sector should be worth about \$45 billion by 2015.

In 2008 the size of industry was around the Rs.1500 crores.

India's medical tourism sector is expected to experience an annual growth rate of 30% making it a Rs.9500 crores industry by 2015.

The challenges are huge and the opportunities are abundant and we need to act right in time. All the above innovative strategies will have its impact on service qualities in medical tourism, create opportunities and challenges for this growing industry which requires cohesive collaborative work between various stakeholders.

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