



Medical Tourism in Gujarat: Undiscovered Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Medical tourism is a new concept where two important service industries are dovetailing to attract people who seek healthcare services located beyond the geographical territory of their country. It provides state of the art private medical care in collaboration with the tourism industry to get patients from other countries at highly competitive price when compared to those prevalent in the western countries. Since Gujarat is an attractive tourist destination and also has some of the best-equipped hospitals and treatment centers, medical treatment combined with tourism is gaining momentum here in recent years.

India emergence as the preferred Global healthcare destination particularly Gujarat is estimated to contribute 25-31% of the industry earnings of one hundred thousand crores. According to CII report, the cost of medical treatment in India is less than 1/3rd of that in many European and US hospitals. If handled skillfully, this sector has the potential for generating a lot of employment as well as foreign exchange revenue, which will help in the overall development of Gujarat state as well as country .

KEYWORDS

Medical tourism, Tourist destination, Cost effectiveness, Medical treatment

Introduction

A medical tourism refers to an increasing tendency among people from England, the U.S and many third world countries where medical services are either very expensive or not available, to leave their countries in search of more affordable health options, often packaged with tourist attractions.

Medical tourism is a new concept where two important service industries are dovetailing to attract people who seek healthcare services located beyond the geographical territory of their country . It provides state of the art private medical care in collaboration with the tourism industry to get patients from other countries at highly competitive price when compared to those prevalent in the western countries.

A new growth sector is medical tourism. Medical tourism in India is a developing concept whereby people from world over visit India for their medical and relaxation needs. Most common treatments are heart surgery, Knee transplant, cosmetic surgery, Gynecology and Dental care. India is a favourable destination because of its infrastructure and technology in which it is at par with those in USA, UK and Europe.

India has some of the best hospital and treatment centers in the world with the best facilities. Since it is also one of the most favourable tourist destination in the world, Medication combines with tourism has come into effect, from which the concept of Medical tourism is derived. It is currently growing at around 30% per annum. Medical tourist arrivals are expected to reach one million soon. If a liver transplant costs in the range of 137,867 USD- 160,845 USD in Europe and double that in the US , a few Indian hospitals have the wherewithal to o it around 34,466 USD- 45,955 USD . Similarly, if a heart surgery in the US costs about Rs 45,955 USD. Medical tourism in India has evolved at a great place and the Indian Sub –continent attracts patients from Southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

Medical Tourism in Gujarat

Gujarat: A Global Health Destination promoting medical tourism

India's emergence as the preferred Global Healthcare destination has attracted patients from the globe to come to India particularly Gujarat for treatment which is estimated to contribute 25-31% of the industry earnings of one hundred thousand crores.

Medical tourism is focused as potential growth sector in Gujarat. Gujarat's leading city, Ahmedabad is a fabulous place for medical tour or medical treatments venue for India's leading exhibition for the travel and tourism industry. Ahmedabad is a preferred medical tourism destination all over the world. With world class health facilities, zero waiting time and affordable cost, Ahmedabad is becoming one of the most sought after medical tourism destination in India. Apart from the world class amenities, Hospitals offer pick up and drop service and ambulance services also. The 108 Service is the highly appreciated 'Medical at doorstep' Service.

Patients who required dedicated treatment and Surgery can avail the 'cost effective' facility with medical camps, travel trips and entertainment.

As part of its Navratri Celebration 2004, the Government of Gujarat took the opportunity to promote its World –class medical facilities and medical expertise making Gujarat as a destination for medical tourism for Non Resident Indians. There were two major events organized during the nine days of Navratri; an exhibition on medical tourism where leading hospital of the state had an opportunity to show their facilities and service packages , and a seminar for discussing issues and concerns related to medical tourism in India and Gujarat.

With over five million tourists visiting Gujarat in the last two years, Gujarat tourism has planned a number of initiatives to develop its tourism infrastructure across the state. Of these, one of the main focuses this year will be the development and promotion of medical tourism. According to Sanjay Kaul, Managing Director, Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited, the tourism board and the State Government are keen on focusing on Medical Tourism as a major sector. "Gujarat has got some of the best medical facilities and we have already started

work on improving the medical infrastructure," he revealed.

About the Exhibition :

The president, Dr Abdul Kalam, inaugurated the exhibition. The exhibition was from 15th -25th October 2004. The hospital such as Apollo, SAL, Shri Krishna Hospital and Medical Research Center Karamsad, Rajasthan hospital ,Krishna Heart Institute, Surat Municipal Institute of Medical Education and Research, the Cardiology ,Kidney and Cancer Institutes of the Civil hospital participated in the exhibition enthusiastically. The exhibition also promoted Indian Systems of Medicine specifically, Ayurveda, Naturopathy and Yoga.

The focus areas for medical tourism have been derived from the fact that there are waiting list in various specialties for both inpatients and outpatients, anything between three weeks to one year in hospitals in UK and USA. Many hospitals in Gujarat have experience in providing services to the NRGs (Non Resident Gujrati's) and according to them the potential areas for Gujarat would be :

- Cardiology
- Renal Transplantation
- Carcinoma
- Dental Care
- Cataract
- Restructuring plastic surgery
- In Vitro Fertilization
- Wellness and screening programme
- Holistic care through Indian Systems of Medicine.

Planning for Medical Tourism ahead

The Government of Gujarat sees this occasion as a beginning for making Gujarat a Global Health Destination. The long-term plans include

- Establishing a Medical tourism council
- Developing a Medical tourism policy
- MOUS with private hospital for provision of high quality health care
- Introduction of Nursing Home act
- Accreditation of service providers so that quality services are assured.

In the long run the Government can think of promoting Medical University, Public health Act and Emergency services act.

Medical Tourism: Gujarat's Prospects

Gujarat has an edge over other player in terms of medical tourism for the following reasons:

- Gujarat is able to provide top quality health care facilities at much cheaper rate.
- Long waiting lists and consequent delays is getting requisite medical treatment from the public healthcare system in the UK, and unaffordable insurance and expensive private hospitals in the US also contribute to the inflow of medical tourists to India.
- The private sector which was earlier playing a modest

role in the healthcare sector in Gujarat has now become a booming industry equipped with the most up-to-date technology.

- Gujarat doctors and surgeons are known throughout the world for their talent, dedication and experience.
- The growth of communication has enhanced the visibility of leading hospitals, doctors and surgeons. Hospitals and medical professional are now showcasing their skills and specialties, pricing, etc., on websites, and such information is now readily available to prospective patients across the world.
- The prices of medicines too are relatively low in Gujarat, as the pharmaceutical industry is able to produce and market drugs at a low cost.
- Non-conventional therapies such as Ayurveda, Unnani and Homeopathy are also attracting many patients due to their unique approaches to treating chronic illnesses.
- Traditional systems of Naturopathy and Yoga also attract a lot of foreign patients to India.
- The Indian education system is churning out an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 doctors and nurses each year.
- Most of the good hospitals in Gujarat are also going in for ISI and JCI certification.
- To maintain its position in the medical tourism industry and withstand growing competition in this field, Gujarat should have a proper short-term and long- term strategy.

Still More to be achieved

Medical tourism in Gujarat is at infant stage, as more people from different countries are choosing Gujarat as the destination for health treatment. But this industry too is facing competition from other countries and states with their attractive costs and world class facilities. To sustain advantage in this field and increase the number of medical tourists, Gujarat needs to keep the following points in mind:

- Promulgate uniform medical education standards throughout the states and ensure proper implementation of the same
- Accreditation of all medical colleges and hospitals should be made compulsory.
- Financial assistance may be provided to deserving private players, be they hospitals, medical spas, etc.
- There should be greater interaction and mutual cooperation between the private healthcare industry and the government.
- Hassle free single- window facility should be put in place for tourists coming to India for medical purposes.
- The Government should undertake aggressive promotion of India as a medical tourism destination.

Conclusion

Medical tourism in Gujarat is at infant stage, as more people from different countries are choosing Gujarat as the destination for health treatment. Gujarat is estimated to contribute 25-31% of the industry earnings of one hundred thousand crores. According to CII report, the cost of medical treatment in India is less than 1/3rd of that in many European and US hospitals. If handled skillfully, this sector has the potential for generating a lot of employment as well as foreign exchange revenue, which will help in the overall development of Gujarat state as well as country .

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