

Medical Tourism: “An Engine of Growth and Employment”

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Abstract:

Fiscal reports from different sources estimate that Medical Tourism in India is growing by 30 per cent a year. It is expected that by the year 2015, India will receive an annual turnout of more than 1.5 million USD. India's top rated education system is not only churning out IT Professionals and Engineers, but an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 doctors and health care specialists every year. The current market CAGR is around 30 and the country is inching towards to major players like Singapore and Thailand. Medical Tourism will help create more than 40 million new employments over the next few years.

Introduction:

Tourism, conventionally, is defined as visiting places other than where you live, for leisure, recreation and other reasons for a short duration. However over the years, the word “Tourism” has not been simply limited to leisure and recreation. In the last few decades with improving health awareness, infrastructure and ever growing expertise in the field of medicine has led to the development called, 'Medical tourism'. A term coined by travel agencies and mass media to address the rapid growth of Health and Tourism industry, it is a common tendency, where people from all around the globe travel to a different country (in this case, India) to obtain medical, dental, and surgical care while at the same time touring and vacationing, enjoying the several attractions that the country has to offer. Medical tourism, especially in India has various fields of modern, traditional and alternative medicine.

These are classified as follows:

Allopathic Medicine: In addition to oral medication, it includes surgeries like -joint replacements, organ transplants, diagnosis, cosmetic surgeries, multi-speciality care and treatment of Infertility, Hematology or diseases related to blood and blood vessels. Furthermore, it also deals with dental implants and orthopaedic care, laser hair removal, hair transplant and lastly, spa and beauty treatments.

Ayurveda: Ayurveda has been a unique health care system indigenous to the country since 600 BC. Ayurveda is a branch of medicine, completely based on a “natural system”, depending on the diagnosis of the body's ailments to achieve the right balance of “*kafa, vata and pitta*”. This natural method of rejuvenation and overcoming ailment has become popular in the recent times.

Yoga: Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Yog’ which means ‘union,’ presumably union with the divine being or God. It is a physiological and spiritual discipline, comprising of a secular and scientific methodology to experience the integration of the mind-body-spirit. India is known as the country where Yoga & Meditation are a way of life.

Other Alternative Medicines includes Homeopathy, Sidhha, Unani, Naturopathy, Meditation and Music Therapy, Aroma Therapy, Pranic Healing and Reiki.

Given the number of options and opportunities available in India, medical tourism is one of the fastest and largest growing industries in the country as well as the world. As the number of uninsured people and those with high deductibles continues to go up, many of them opt to be treated outside their native land, where they can manage to pay for the treatments. Medical Tourism in India offers low cost, or cost effective medical

treatment with no waiting lists and accessibility of skilled and renowned medical experts, allowing medical tourists from all over the world an easy access. At present, the expectation is that Medical Tourism will continue to grow up at a rapid rate of speed and continue offering medical treatments to tourist at a minimum cost they can get at home.

Not only medical tourism India is considered among the best in international tourist destinations also. India with its present slogan "*Atithi Devo Bhava*", which means that a guests equivalent to a God, assures service providers to provide end-to end services. These include— special treatment, treatment-cum-leisure destination, low-cost consultation and treatment, no waiting period for treatment and availability of advanced equipments. Maximum tourists arrive from Africa, Middle East, Afghanistan, Iraq and Bangladesh etc. The inflow, however, is a lot less from developed nations in Europe and North America.

Currently, a large number of patients primarily come for Angioplasty, Cardiac Surgeries, Joint replacement, Eye surgery including Cataract, Organ transplant including Liver and Kidney, IVF, Cancer treatment besides many other difficult to treat conditions. This quality health care comes with ultra modern fully equipped tertiary hospitals, growing insurance market, and strong presence of the pharmaceutical industries. Other key government players include— Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of tourism. According to Indian Medical/ Health Tourism Service Sector Network Report Sector Overview and SWOT Analysis, within the initiative, Sustainable Industrial Networks and its applications on Micro Regional Environmental Planning (SINET) India with advanced medical services, paired with exotic natural bounties has become a heaven for medical tourists. The Medical Tourism Industry in India is considered to be the next big success story after software. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and McKinsey have predicted that the industry will grow to earn additional revenue for up market tertiary hospitals and will account for 3-5 per cent of the total healthcare delivery market. The Indian medical tourism industry, growing at an annual rate of 30 per cent, caters to patients chiefly from the West Asia, Middle East Africa and to some extent from US and Europe. Although in its nascent stage, the industry is outsmarting similar industries of other countries such as Greece, South Africa, Jordan, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore.

India's National Health Policy declares that treatment of foreign patients is legally an "export" and deemed "eligible for all fiscal incentives extended to export earnings." Government and private sector studies in India estimate that medical tourism could bring between 1 billion and 2 billion (1.25 billion Euros and 2.50 billion Euros) into the country. Fiscal reports from different sources estimate that medical tourism to India is growing by 30 per cent a year. It is expected that by the year 2015, India will receive an annual turnout of more than one and a half million USD. India's top-rated education system is not only churning out computer programmers and engineers, but an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 doctors and nurses each year. The current market growth-rate is around 30 per cent per year and the country is inching closer to major players like Singapore and Thailand. Medical tourism will help create 40 million new jobs over the next few years.

The areas that are likely to witness huge growth in the coming years include:

1. **Marketing** – The leading hospitals offering medical tourism market their services through the Internet, healthcare facilitators and sometimes, personal visits to patients abroad for which efficient marketing personnel are required.
2. **Interpreter**– For patients coming from the non-English speaking European, African and West Asian countries, translators are critical since the patient needs to understand the protocols around their medical treatment.
3. **Back office Support** – The back office functions in medical tourism are as demanding on talent as they are in the other service industries with good communications and interpersonal skills being the baseline requirements.
4. **Hospitality Professionals** – While high end clinical acumen is the foundation for good healthcare, there is immense demand for service and managerial talent too.

The main reason for India's emergence as a preferred destination is the inherent advantage of its healthcare industry. Today, Indian healthcare is perceived to be at par with global standards. Some of the top Indian

hospitals and doctors have strong international reputations. But the most important factor that drives medical tourism to India is its low cost advantage. Majority of foreign patients visit India primarily to avail of “First World Service at Third World Cost.”

Benefits of Medical Tourism:

1. Increase Forex Reserve which add not only economic wealth but reduce current account deficit of country also.
2. Cost advantage in tariff over the developed countries.
3. Technology and knowledge transfer.
4. Increase in efficiency of patient care process, cutting edge treatment.
5. Improvement in hospital supply chain efficiency.
6. Strategic alliances with business partners within and outside the country.
7. Better logistics performance both internal and external.
8. Employment opportunities in the industry.
9. Better utilization of infrastructure and skilled manpower.
10. Opportunity for development of infrastructure in Health, Tourism and Travel.
11. Increased wealth per capita.
12. Scope for Research and Development to offer comprehensive medical solutions.
13. International acceptance of country as a global healthcare provider.
14. Social and cross cultural experience and International customer relations.
15. Global marketing and medical trade relations.
16. Brand image of nation as a world class healthcare destination.
17. Better coordination among the stakeholders i.e. hospital and hospitality industry.
18. Public and Private Partnerships.
19. Patient satisfaction.

Challenges:

1. No strong government support/ initiative to promote medical tourism.
2. Minimum coordination between various stakeholders in the industry– airlines, Tour Operators, Hotels and Hospitals.
3. Customer perception as an unhygienic country.

4. Lack of uniform pricing policies across hospitals.
5. Competition from countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines.
6. Lack of international accreditation a major inhibitor.
7. Under-investment in health infrastructure.
8. Lack of proper insurance policies for this sector.
9. Lack of skilled Human Resources to manage patient are playing havoc.

The Way Forward:

1. With multiple players in the field, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare together with the Ministry of Tourism should set up a Task Force.
2. A consultative meeting with all the key officials should be organized to address the gaps and challenges and their solutions.
3. The Task Force should evaluate the opportunities in the industry and formulate a policy for accrediting healthcare institutions in the country.
4. To adopt standardized procedures and facilitate foreign patients in selecting the best hospitals.
5. To provide for brighter prospects for the industry, the hospitals can also acquire international accreditation, integrate traditional and clinical treatments and offer end-to-end value added services.
6. To enhance competitive advantage with lesser waiting time for treatment.
7. Government should promote to diversify the scope of medical tourism with other mode of treatment. To better the connectivity with the patient's home country.
8. To map the Indian medical tourism geographies and value of network of facilitators serving medical tourists.
9. To understand the problems and challenges faced by medical tourists visiting India.
10. The government should initiate capacity building programmes to train paramedical and non-medical staffs of the service providers for cross-cultural sensitivities.
11. To focus on language training for select countries from where tourists are coming in larger numbers.

Conclusion:

This newfound need to travel internationally for medical and recreational purposes has come to be known as “Medical Tourism”. More and more people are travelling outside their own country to get treatment for the ailments / disease they are suffering from. Cosmetic and Aesthetic surgery has also attained an important reason for people to travel. That’s why a condition, which is not under the gambit of ailment, or disease has also come under the umbrella of Medical/ Health Tourism.

Medical tourism is a big source for forex reserve irrespective of varying cost of treatment in different countries as, besides treatment, the consumer of health services has to spend on stay outside hospital for

many disease conditions thus helping hotel and food industry. While going back home, the patients and their attendants also like to shop thus they contribute greatly towards the economy.

In short, Medical Tourism not only helps to generate foreign currency, but also is a grand vehicle to market the country to citizens of different countries. The overall satisfying experience provided to the patient and his/her attendants invites and motivates others to travel to the country.

India has carved a strong niche in the field of Medical Tourism over the years for the reasons of offering Medical Services of international standards at the lowest possible cost. India has a large pool of healthcare facilities of international standard and medical professionals par excellence besides highly trained and empathetic support staff. The country offers the best of treatment at cost, which is in many cases, less than 25 per cent of what one would spend in Europe, Australia and United States of America. Today, on an average, corporate sector hospitals treat over 15 per cent foreign patients of total patients they treat every year. This number runs into tens of thousands bringing huge much needed foreign exchange that may run into billions of dollars.

Despite the Medical Tourism in India growing at a fast pace, it still remains a highly unorganized sector where lots of middlemen with little or no knowledge and training to manage patient are playing havoc. A vast majority of middle men are touts, fleecing patients and attendants on every single service required thus causing harm to the visitor both financially and psychologically and despite best of treatment offered by hospital, the visitors does not have overall health / positive experience or they leave in a bad taste.

In summation, it is high time to declare the Medical Tourism an Industry in India with well-defined guidelines with the goal to provide “Winning Experience” to visitors. Otherwise the Engine of Growth and Employment ” with the potential to become over 100 billion dollars may end up as “A Lost Opportunity” that not only yields direct and indirect financial resources but also provides Brand Image an excellent tool to propagate the good will of India.

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