



Medical tourism in India: Issues and the future prospective

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Abstract

After success of information technology sector, second best service offer by India is the medical tourism. Medical tourism is the combination of healthcare and tourism sector. It is an upcoming business that contributes in earning foreign exchange for the country. Due to affordable medical prices, low fare rate and favorable exchange rate numbers of patients from UK, Japan and Europe come to India for medical tour. This raise the standard of Indian medical science at international platform which further promote Indian tourism. But as a developing country, India is facing some major problems such as lack of infrastructure, poor management, limited capital and lack of coordination between insurance companies, hospitals, tourist agency and hotels etc. Thus the objective of present research is to study the current issues and challenges faced by Indian medical tourism and the opportunities available for the medical tourism in India. Previous research papers publication and online material on the issue are the sources of data for present study.

Keywords: Medical science, Tourism, Healthcare, Infrastructure and Medical Tourism

1. Introduction

Medical tourism is a new business of tourism to attract tourist in the country. It is getting popularity worldwide and has provided great opportunities for Indian economy. It has been seen as business idea to earn foreign exchange and contribute to the GDP of Indian economy. Medical tourism provides dual benefit as firstly numbers of patients from developed countries come to India for medical benefits and secondly the Indian tourism is getting promoted. The patient or the member coming along with the patient could get attract to the tourist places in India. Medical tourism refers to the traveling of patient from their home country to the other country to get benefit of medical services at minimum time and affordable prices. The emergence of medical tourism is due to long waiting hour for medical facilities and high price of medical services in developed countries whereas India, Malaysia, Singapore etc. are some countries those offered the best medical facilities at affordable time with minimum waiting time. These developing countries providing the medical services at much lower prices than the developed countries such as UK, Japan and other Europe etc. India, due to its geographical location and rich culture always remain a good tourist destination for the developed countries. Indian medical services also known as world's best in class service. All new technology based medical equipment doctors, trained nurses, hospital are available here. Medical services offered by Indian doctors are also very popular, such as heart surgeries specially open heart surgery, beauty services, cardiology and Yuga etc.

1.1 Literature Review

According to Dawn and Pal (2011) ^[8] the term medical tourism is the act of traveling to other countries to obtain medical, dental and surgical care. Vinod, Shekar and Makkalageri (2014) ^[6] defined the Medical Tourism as a

new approaching of Medicine and Tourism; it is the practice of traveling from one country to another to receive medical attention that could be in form of heart surgery, breast implants, a hip replacement, or dental work etc. Goodrich & Goodrich (1987) ^[1], medical tourism is the promotion of medical services of the country to attract tourists by deliberately promoting its health-care services and facilities, in addition to its regular tourist amenities. Monica (2007) ^[3] described that when international tourist or patients come across the international boundaries to get medical benefit and healthcare, it can be defined as provision of cost effective private medical care in collaboration with the tourism industry for patients needing surgical and other forms of specialized treatment. Laws (1996) ^[4] have defined medical tourism as a travel from home to other destination to improve one's health condition as one type of leisure. This includes getting indigenous and alternative medical services, and any other form of tourism undertaken with the purpose of addressing a health concern. According to GATS (General Agreement on Trade and Services), medical tourism is the second mode of trade in health services. In this mode, customers (patients) leave their home country to obtain health care services with high quality and affordable prices. Carrera and Bridges (2006) ^[2] have defined medical tourism as properly planned tour of patient to travel other countries to maintain their health condition, or get other surgical treatment. Normally, the majority of medical tourists come from the industrialized country like UK, Europe, Japan, US, Middle East and Canada, because the cost of medical services are very high as compare to India (Dawn and Pal, 2011) ^[8] the reason been that these developed countries have problem of the spiraling costs of health care due to technological development, public expectations, and specially the rapidly increasing size of their elderly populations (Vinod, Shekar and

Makkalageri, 2014)^[6]. Being developed country American health care system suffering from longer wait time, and this affect the health of patient (Chad Niemeyer, 2011). Medical tourism is popular because of its shorter waiting time compare to developed country, cost effective medical services, and lower rate of air fares, communication facilities, good diagnoses centers and availabilities of specialist doctors (Dawn and Pal, 2011)^[8] 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. While a heart-valve replacement costs about \$0.2 million (around Rs 1 crore) in the US, in India it can be done in \$10,000 (around Rs 5 lakh), which also includes round-trip airfare (Vinod, Shekar and Makkalageri, 2014)^[6]. India medical science have the popular indigenous healthcare traditions which includes Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Naturopathy, and Yoga (Dawn and Pal, 2011)^[8]. Ayush & Allopathic system of Indian Medicine like Ayurveda, yoga, Unani is becoming more popular (Ayush) among foreigners who visit for medical tourism (Vinod, Shekar and

Makkalageri, 2014)^[6]. Medical tourism is a million dollar business to tape this business there is also a need to develop supporting infrastructure such as transport services to facilitate tourism in India. The tourism, health, information and communication departments need to work in tandem for efficient patient care. In India only private sector hospital were actively promoting medical tourism which is not satisfactory as it also required support of public sector hospital for the growth of medical tourism (Dawn and Pal 2011)^[8]. Those foreign patients who came to India for the medical tour were treated at the leading hospitals in India like Apollo, Escorts, and Hinduja etc. these are all private sector own hospitals (Vinod, Shekar and Makkalageri, 2014)^[6].

1.2 Swot Analysis of Medical Tourism in India

SWOT analysis states strength, weakness, opportunities and threats for Indian Medical Tourism. It states the current situation of medical tourism covering both positive and negative side and also provides information about the potential of medical tourism in India.

Strength	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cost services • Qualified Doctors • Advanced Healthcare Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hygiene Factors • Lack of trust • Inadequate Infrastructure • Lack of capital • Inadequate support from public sector • No specialized bodies for regulatory • Complex visa procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural tourism • Public private partnership • Joint venture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong competitors • Environmental change • Tourist harassment

Fig 1

1.3 Issues of medical tourism in India

Indian medical tourism is on blooming stage. There are great opportunities with India for medical tourism, but as a developing countries India is facing some major problems in form of poor infrastructure, lack of capital etc. these problems becomes issues of medical tourism. After SWOT analysis some key point of issues came forward as:

1. **Lack of infrastructure** - as a developing country Indian infrastructure is not fully developed. Those tourists coming for medical treatment in India are facing problems proper facility of transportation, accommodation. The medical tour is becomes difficult when there no link of hotel hospital transportation etc. also the procedure of obtaining medical visa, clime of insurance, other documentation process make the procedure more complicated.

2. **Key Competitors** - Along with India there are other countries that promote medical tourism, such as Cuba, Costa Rica, Hungary, India, Israel, Jordan, Lithuania, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, Belgium, Poland and Singapore. These countries are actively promoting medical tourism and provide specialized medical services. Indian medical tourism is competent for cost effectiveness. It is the single factor that favors the Indian tourism. But the close competitor like Thailand, Malaysia proved strong player in medical tourism business. Indian medical tourism need to find the alternate services or resource to stay competent in medical tourism.

3. **Public sector participation** - All big hospital promoting medical tourism form India like Apollo, Fortis etc are private own hospitals. Public sector hospitals are not contributing for medical tourism alike the private sector. Even many hospitals of India lacks in providing the hygienic medical facilities and room services including hygienic food to the patient,

as a result Indian hospitals are losing trust of foreign patients. India ranks second for medical tourism in the world. Though it spends less than 1.2% of its GDP on medical services but makes extra efforts to provide extra care and services to the foreign tourist while dealing with them (Sharma, 2013) [5].

4. **Marketing of medical services** - Indian medical science is not only limited to the advance equipped. It also includes the Ayurveda, Yuga, naturopathy, homeopathy etc. these are the unique assets with Indian medical science. These sciences could be fully utilized to attract foreign tourist. India is still lacking behind in good infrastructure, which has been a reason that Indian medical science could not get that place at international platform that it deserve.
5. **Lack of coordination** - Medical tourism is a million dollar business and India is going to be perfect place to medical tourism due to its geographical diversity, rich heritage and culture value. But India could tap this market only when there is presence of good management, there is requirement for proper coordination between tourism agency, hotel, transportation facilities hospitals etc. Due to lack of proper management Indian medical tourism is not properly advertised and it adversely affects the growth and popularity of tourism business in India.

1.4 Future of Medical Tourism in India

1. Medical tourism is a growing sector in India. India's medical tourism sector is expected to experience an annual growth rate of 30%, making it a Rs. 9,500-crore industry by 2015. Estimates of the value of medical tourism to India go as high as \$2 billion a year by 2012.
2. The Indian Ministry of Tourism has started a new category of visas for medical tourists called the "M" or medical visas. Further efforts have been made to improve the basic infrastructure including aviation sector to ensure smooth arrival and departure of health tourists.
3. National bodies for regulating medical tourism need to be established in India to observe the parties providing facilities in medical tourism and smoothen the process of medical tourism in India to get easy access of medical facilities, traveling and hotel facilities.
4. Tourist harassment is an issue that requires timely action. People those come to India if they are not getting proper treatment then it can lead to negative word of mouth which is the biggest threat for the Indian tourism. Medical tourist needs extra care, matter related to medical tourist need to be settled down easily and speedily so that the country's reputation is not hampered.
5. The best way before India to face competitions in medical tourism is to enter in joint venture with another counter or in-house joint venture with public sector hospitals. One country cannot be specialized in all medical facilities if a joint venture emerge between India and other country then it can provide great opportunities for both the countries.

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