

Progress and Challenges of Medical Tourism in India


Tourism

KEYWORDS :

K.S. VIJAYANAMBI

Research Scholar & Head of the Department, State Institute of Hospitality Management, West hill, Calicut, Kerala, India.

Dr.R.KANNAN

Research Supervisor & Associate Professor, Centre For Tourism and Hotel Management, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai - 625021.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, a large number of tourists from different parts of the world come to India in search for cost effective medical treatment. It signified that medical tourism in India today is a big industrial sector as well as contributing significantly to the country's growth. It is also considered as the prime source of bringing foreign currency into India.

Cardiology, cardiothoracic surgery, orthopedic knee replacement, angioplasty, and cosmetic surgeries are the most in favor as the cost factor is considerably marked across

these areas. A large number of hospitals have entered into the agreements with the international health insurance companies to compensate the cost of healthcare of foreign visitors.

Medical tourism- When there is a significant price difference between countries for a given medical procedure, particularly in Southeast Asia, India, Eastern Europe and where there are different regulatory regimes, in relation to particular medical procedures (e.g. dentistry), traveling to take advantage of the price or regulatory differences is often referred to as "medical tourism". Medical tourism refers to "travel with the express purpose of obtaining health services abroad". The practice of medical tourism does not exist without criticism, particularly when involving patients from developed nations going to developing nations for procedures. It is thought to contribute to the commodification of health and health care by allowing those with the financial means to do so to purchase care that may be unavailable to other citizens. It has been suggested that if the industry is properly regulated, medical tourism can provide a viable means by which developing countries can gain access to needed revenue and developed countries can lessen 'bottlenecks' in their health systems. Ramirez suggested that presence of medical tourism hospitals in developing nations is also thought to lessen the international brain drain of health human resources by providing surgeons and others with access to advanced, high technology work environments.

Tourism is travel for recreational, leisure or business purposes. The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as people who "travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty-four (24) hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited".

Tourism is vital for many countries, and many island nations, due to the large intake of money for businesses with their goods and services and the opportunity for employment in the service industries associated with tourism. These service industries include transportation services, such as airlines, cruise ships and taxicabs, hospitality services, such as accommodations, including hotels and resorts, and entertainment venues, such as amusement parks, casinos, shopping malls, music venues and theatres.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) forecasts that international tourism will continue growing at the average annual rate of 4%. Not only as a result of the important economic contribution of the tourism industry, but also as an indicator of

the degree of confidence with which global citizens leverage the resources of the globe for the benefit of their local economies. This is why any projections of growth in tourism may serve as an indication of the relative influence that each country will exercise in the future. Technological improvement is likely to make possible air-ship hotels, based either on solar-powered airplanes or large dirigibles. Underwater hotels, such as Hydropolis, expected to open in Dubai in 2009, will be built. On the ocean, tourists will be welcomed by ever larger cruise ships and perhaps floating cities.

Medical tourism (also called medical travel, health tourism or global healthcare) is a term initially coined by travel agencies and the mass media to describe the rapidly growing practice of traveling across international borders to obtain health care. It also refers pejoratively to the practice of healthcare providers traveling internationally to deliver healthcare. Services typically sought by travelers include elective procedures as

well as complex specialized surgeries such as joint replacement (knee/hip), cardiac surgery, dental surgery, and cosmetic surgeries. However, virtually every type of health care, including psychiatry, alternative treatments, convalescent care and even burial services are available.

POPULARITY OF MEDICAL TOURISM

The increasing popularity of medical travel include the high cost of health care, long wait times for certain procedures, the ease and affordability of international travel, and improvements in both technology and standards of care in many countries are the main factors responsible for the increase in medical tourism. Cost seems to play an important role in the occurrence of medical tourism, many surgery procedures performed

overseas cost a fraction of the price they do in America. For example a liver transplant

that cost \$300,000 USD in America cost about \$91,000 USD in Taiwan. A large draw to medical travel is convenience and speed. Countries that operate public health care systems are often so taxed that it can take considerable time to get non-urgent medical care. Canada has set waiting-time benchmarks, e.g. 26 weeks for a hip replacement and 16 weeks for cataract surgery, for non-urgent medical procedures.

Medical tourists can come from anywhere in the First World, including Europe, the Middle East, Japan, the United States, and Canada. This is because of their 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.

Medical tourism for knee/hip replacements has emerged as one of the more widely accepted procedures because of the lower cost and minimal difficulties associated with the traveling to/ from the surgery. Colombia provides a knee replacement for about \$5,000 USD, including all associated fees, such as FDA-approved prosthetics and hospital stay-over expenses. However, many clinics quote prices that are not all-inclusive and include only the surgeon fees associated with the procedure.

Popular medical travel worldwide destinations include Argen-