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A STUDY ON THE GROWTH OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is known as an attractive and pleasing human activity, it is admired by all people and governments. Being the integral part of tourism, Medical tourism has emerged as the fastest growing fragment in tourism industry in Global Economic. Medical tourism in India is perfect combination of health treatment as well as sightseeing. This is evident in the rise in the volume of foreigners who are visiting India for treatment. The growth of medical tourism in India is a benefit for quite a lot of connected industries like hospitals, medical equipment, pharmaceutical companies and hospitality industry. This paper examines the potentiality of Medical Tourism in India and the role of hotels and hospitality industry in promoting the concept of medical tourism, thereby making India an attractive medical tourism destination for all.

KEYWORDS

medical tourism, hospitality industry.

INTRODUCTION

The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as “people who travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty-four hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure”. Business and other purposes not related to the implement of an activity compensated from within the place visited. It is an industry concerned with attracting people, to a destination, transporting them there, housing, feeding, and entertaining them upon arrival and returning them to their homes. Today with the rise in the standard of living of people in several developed and developing countries along with fast technological revolution in transportation industry, overseas holidays are with the reach of middle and working class.

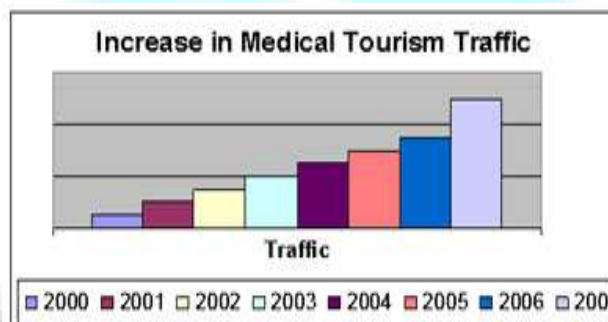
In addition to a leisure time activity, tourism has many facets- cultural tourism, religion, rural, medical etc. Medical tourism (also called medical travel, health tourism or global healthcare) is a term initially coined by travel agencies and the mass media to describe the rapidly-growing practice of traveling across international borders to obtain health care. It also refers pejoratively to the practice of healthcare providers traveling internationally to deliver healthcare.

The concept of medical tourism is not a new one. The first recorded instance of medical tourism dates back thousands of years to when Greek pilgrims traveled from all over the Mediterranean to the small territory in the Saronic Gulf called Epidauria. Spa towns and sanitariums may be considered an early form of medical tourism. In eighteenth century England, for example, patients visited spas because they were places with supposedly health-giving mineral waters, treating diseases from gout to liver disorders and bronchitis.

India is a global leader in medical tourism, and one of the world's least expensive choices among medical tourism destinations. Focusing on heart surgery, India also attracts patients with high quality dental care, Ayurvedic spa treatments and other medical and alternative treatments. Medical tourism in India has emerged as the fastest growing segment of tourism industry despite the global economic down turn.

Overseas tourists are provided with cheap health care services in India than other developed countries. A study by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) states that the profit in 2012 is \$2.3 billion. The number of foreigners visited India for treatment in 2004 is 150,000, it is rising 15 percent every year.

FIG. 1



Source: Wikipedia

The growth of India's medical tourism market will be a boon for several associated industries including hospitals, medical equipment, pharmaceutical and hospitality industry.

Indian hotels are too entering the wellness services market by tying up with professional organizations in a range of wellness fields and offering spas and ayurvedic massage. In this paper we will discuss the key factors which are making India an attractive medical tourism destination and how it can boost up the business of Indian hotels.

GLOBAL VIEW FOR MEDICAL TOURISM

The medical tourism industry earned global revenues of USD 20 billion in 2005 and the Asian market comprising India, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia stood at approx USD 2.5 billion in 2006. While the global market is predicted to double in size to USD 40 billion a year by 2010, it is estimated that the Asian market will generate in excess of USD 4.4 billion by 2012.

FIG. 2

		Singapore	India	Malaysia	Thailand
2005/06	Approx. No. of Medical Tourists	350,000 - 370,000	175,000	150,000	1,000,000
	Est. Revenue (USD Million)	900	333	400	803
2010/12	Est. Revenue (USD Million)	3000	1100 - 2200	600 - 1000	1200 (2008)

Source: Wikipedia

Government and service providers have been quick to recognize the potential of medical tourism and have leverage existing strengths and taken concrete initiative to tap into larger potential of this as a key revenue generator for their countries' economies.

On the economic front medical tourism is rapidly growing into a valuable revenue generator for countries such as Thailand, Singapore, India and Malaysia. The flow of medical tourist has increased by as much as 20-30% a year and government targets to generate revenues of USD 1-3 billion by 2010-2012. It is estimated that over 450,000 medical tourist traveled to India to seek healthcare in 2007.

REASONS FOR INDIA TO BE THE FAVORITE GLOBAL HEALTH DESTINATION

India has no parallels in healthcare when it comes to cost effective treatments in comparison with other countries. Significant cost differences exist among US, UK and South Asian countries. A cost comparison study has been made by the American Medical Association of healthcare in different countries. The statistics released by AMA announces that a knee replacement surgery would cost \$40,000 in US, \$10,000 in Thailand and \$13,000 in Singapore, while the same surgery would cost the person \$8500 in India. Thus India provides reasonable medical treatments comparing with other developed countries. In addition, Indian doctors are distinguished all over the world for their aptitude and skills.

A heart valve replacement surgery would cost the patients \$200,000 in the US and \$90,000 in Britain while it would cost \$12,500 in Singapore and \$10,000 in Thailand. The same procedure in India would cost only \$8,000. While a bone marrow transplant would cost \$30,000 in India, in US it would cost anywhere between \$250,000- \$400,000 while in UK the cost would be of the order of \$150,000. Doctors in Thailand would charge \$3,500 for cosmetic surgery while those in US and UK would charge \$20,000 and \$10,000, respectively. But in India, it costs only \$2000, so it comes around 75% to 95% of healthcare costs. Although costs in European countries such as Germany and Belgium may be less than that in the United States, but Europe is still more expensive than India. In fact, the data of AMA shows that India is the least expensive when compared to European as well as other Asian countries.

FOLLOWING COST COMPARISON TABLES PROVE THE FINANCIAL VIABILITY OF THE INDIAN HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY COST COMPARISON OF SELECTED SURGERIES

TABLE 1

Procedure	United States (\$)	Thailand (\$)	Singapore (\$)	India (\$)
Heart bypass	130000	11000	18500	10000
Heart valve replacement	160000	10000	12500	9000
Angioplasty	57000	13000	13000	11000
Hip replacement	43000	12000	12000	9000
Hysterectomy	20000	4500	6000	3000
Knee replacement	40000	10000	13000	8500
Spinal fusion	62000	7000	9000	5500

Source: AMA, June 2007

COST COMPARISON BETWEEN US,UK&INDIA

TABLE 2

Procedure	USA (\$)	UK (\$)	India (\$)
Open Heart Surgery (CABG)	100000	43000	7500
Total Knee Replacement	48000	52000	6300
Hip Resurfacing	55000	48000	7000
LA Hysterectomy	22000	24000	4000
Lap Cholecystectomy	18000	3000	
Spinal Decompression Fusion	60000	5500	
Obesity Surgery (Gastric Bypass)	65000	70000	9500

Source: Wockhardt Hospitals

COSMETIC SURGERY (Costs in US\$)

TABLE 3

Procedure	United States (\$)	Thailand (\$)	Singapore (\$)	India (\$)
Face-lift	20000	4800	6250	3100
Breast Augmentation	10000	3150	8000	2200
Breast Reduction	10000	3900	8000	3000
Eyelid Surgery	7000	1400	3750	2200
Liposuction	10000	2100	5000	2500
Nose Surgery	7300	3850	4400	1800
Tummy Tuck	8500	4050	6250	3400

Source: healthbase.com

Apart from the cost of medical treatments language is also a factor that makes India the most desired destination. English is one of our country's official languages and the official language of business too. This has significant appeal to those visitors with very specific needs. Indian Hospitals have 24 hour multilingual help desk and good English speaking doctors, guides, and medical staff.

Medical facilities at India's leading private hospitals are excellent and state of the art. Despite the country's reputation for poverty and poor hygiene, the value for money offered here draws thousands of patients each year. Latest technologically advanced diagnostic equipments are used for medical treatment in India. India is known as a value for money destination for health care because we produce over 30,000 new doctors each year combined with a diverse genetic pool for drug testing.

Most of the doctors and nurses in India are certified to western standard and practices. Add to it, the waiting time which is almost nil in case of India. As compared to the long waiting periods in the industrialized and developing nations. Patients from the western world are finding that insurance either does not cover orthopedic surgery (such as knee/hip replacement) or imposes unreasonable restrictions on the choice of the facility, surgeon, or prosthetics to be used. With the rise of medical tourism in Indian, people from all over the world wish to get perfect treatment and care in hospitals and nursing homes in India. To come to the services of these people who are visitors from India who wish to consult a doctor, tourism and travel has added another feather in all major cities of the India that are popular housing hospitals. To accommodate patients and their relatives, hospitals in India are linked to a wide range of hotels near the top hospitals in India.

Hotels near the top hospitals in India are a boon for patients and families who come from all over the world for medical treatment and care. They need places to put up when they reach their destination. Places closer hospitals if they are interested in for treatment is an additional advantage. The Indian hotels near hospitals to address this issue offer extremely comfortable accommodation at a reasonable price to their customers in medical visits.

The top hotels by hospitals that provide home medical tourists link with the travel agency for business travel that their clients have an option of success. The facilities offered by these Indians hotels near top hospitals are affordable accommodation, boarding, medical emergency and even sight see organized trips for families of patients currently under treatment in hospitals.

These Hotels near the top hospitals in India are becoming more numerous each day and they are also gaining wide popularity and public attention not only in India but anywhere in the world due to their level and consistent services offered.

SOME OF HOTELS NEAR THE TOP HOSPITALS IN INDIA WHICH HAVE GAINED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION FOR PREMIER QUALITY SERVICE AND ACCESSIBLE FACILITY ARE GIVEN BELOW:

Apollo Hospitals are a great group of doctors who provide outlets for services to patients seeking medical care in India and abroad. The hotels which are now large companies associating themselves with the Apollo group of hospitals that are well known to the nerve centers of life are as follows:

- Crown Plaza Hotel, New Delhi
- Hotel Taj Mansingh
- Vasant Continental Hotel
- Hotel Hill View, New Delhi
- Hotel Samrat
- Grand Sartaj Hotel
- Hotel Rajdoot Delhi

AIIMS or, All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi to meet a large number of patients both in India and abroad. The hotels near AIIMS, which are well known among the top hotels hospitals in India, are as follows:

- Hotel. International Regency
- Hyatt
- Hotel Grand Sartaj
- Hotel Vikram

Of the most popular Hotels near the top hospitals in India, hotels and resorts around Fortis Hospital in Vasant Kunj deserve no less praise for both ease of access to hospital and a good service to customers at a reasonable price.

- Hotel Vasant Continental, Delhi
- Grand Hotel

Hospital to up sell themselves are trying to get affiliated with health care organizations and insurance company in the US and the west .This enables the western medical tourist to select India as their favorite destination that caters for their medical as well as leisure needs.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE THE MEDICAL TOURIST FLOW IN INDIA?

Indian government should step forward and try to convince health care insurance companies to sell plans covering offshore healthcare. Most of the insurance company in west don't allow options to select India .Government of India should take necessary steps to improve facilities provided by minor institutions and enforce laws to get them accredited to international accreditation committees. In India malpractice laws and implementations are still inefficient. Infrastructure facilities in the surrounding communities do not resemble western standards too. Once tourist leaves the hospital they are at their own risk. We should try to develop the surrounding environment to help western tourist feel home away from home. As the cost of health insurance premiums are increasing in western world more and more western people are ready to travel to different destinations for their medical needs. India should see this as an opportunity to improve more tourist inflow in our country. When numerous patients' from the different parts of the world select India for their medical needs, then it is certain that Indian hospitality industry will too be benefited.

Corporate tax on hospitals should be further reduced which in turn will help the hospitals to purchase and install the state of the art technology. We need to improve our local transportation infrastructure and airports. Initiative should be taken to advertise regional medical tourism .we should advertise more about the benefits of regional medicine and our ancient practices like yoga, etc. News paper ads, special discounts, call centers, hospital websites, television commercials, billboards, classified advertisement; press releases are one among the best mediums to boost tourism in this sector. The government should take more initiative to provide priority medical visas. By Co branding hotels with the well know hospitals we can satisfy western medical tourist all needs like comfortable stay, good food, internet, sightseeing etc.

CONCLUSION

The future of medical tourism seems promising with increased promotion. Other countries are expanding their health care systems, encouraging tourists to visit. India is revising plans to build a medical tourism resort, providing superior accommodation in "a hotel and hospital combination". Rajasthan has great potential to be a serious player in the global healthcare services industry. Governments perhaps need to limit expenditure on international visitors and focus on maintaining the health of their own citizens via stronger regulatory systems.

Medical tourism can give great contribution in Indian economy if managed well could be a progressive step towards quality health care for foreign medical tourists.

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