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HEALTHCARE AND MEDICAL TOURISM: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT**R. VEERAPPAN****ASST PROFESSOR****DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION****SACRED HEART COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)****TIRUPATTUR****J. SASIGANTH****DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES****ASST PROFESSOR****SACRED HEART COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)****TIRUPATTUR****FR. ANGELO JOSEPH****HEAD****DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION****SACRED HEART COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)****TIRUPATTUR****A. JOE ROBINSON****STUDENT****SACRED HEART COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)****TIRUPATTUR****ABSTRACT**

There was no tourism in the beginning, Tourism is getting out of the usual rut of things and going away from one's home base for some rest and recreation. It was about meeting new people, seeing new places and having new experiences. The things have come a long way from there as Now, tourism is no longer a singular activity, and it is not about simply having a good time goofing off. These days it is 'thematic tourism'. Tourism has evolved in to sports tourism, eco-tourism, bio tourism, aqua tourism, heritage tourism, beach tourism and so on. Fast jumping on to the thematic tourism bandwagon is Medical Tourism or Health Tourism. Health tourism refers to the increasing tendency among people living where medical services are either very expensive or not available to travel overseas in search of more affordable health options, often packaged with tourist attractions. Today India has become one of the fastest growing economic nations in the field of Medical Tourism. India is one of the leading players in the Medical Tourism industry today. It requires overcoming all the weakness and the barriers to become the emerging industry in the coming years.

KEYWORDS

healthcare, medical tourism.

INTRODUCTION

A simple way to explain the concept of medical tourism would be to say that it is not a standalone effort of either the healthcare or the tourism industry, but is an integrated and collaborative approach from both the industries. India is ranked among the top five international holiday destinations when Independent Traveler conducted a poll in 134 countries. India is rated amongst the world's top ten "must see destinations". Hopefully, today we are in a better position to sell our tourism services to the rest of the world.

India is probably the only country that offers various categories of tourism. These include history tourism, adventure tourism, medical tourism, spiritual tourism, adventure tourism, medical tourism, beach tourism etc. The countries where medical tourism is being actively prompted include Greece, South Africa, Japan, India, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore. India has the most competent doctors and world class medical facilities. The merits of Medical Tourism in India are best medical treatment, high quality medical care low wait time for treatments, Hospitality, Multi - Talented Doctors and nurses and fluency English Speaking Staff members.

Sports tourism, eco-tourism, bio tourism, aqua tourism, heritage tourism, beach tourism and so on where it has a fast jumping on to the thematic tourism bandwagon is Medical Tourism or Health Tourism. Health tourism refers to the increasing tendency among people living where medical services are either very expensive or not available to travel overseas in search of more affordable health options, often packaged with tourist attractions.

The World tourism Organization includes the following in its definition of medical tourism; medical care, sickness and well-being, rehabilitation and recuperation. The concept of Medical Tourism is not entirely new, As a matter of fact, as far back as 3,000 B.C. people with eye problems made pilgrimage to Tell Brak, Syria, where healing deities were said to perform miracles. Ancient Roman spas that were believed to cure an endless list of ailments still offer hope and relief to bathers today. As people travelled to these destinations they had inadvertently embarked on Medical Tourism.

According to the International Trade Centre, Geneva, the global demand for clinical services has estimated US\$804 billion in the year 2000 itself, Where it is a large market and everybody seems to want a piece of the pie. Traditionally, the western countries were considered the leaders and front runners in good healthcare. Times have changed and these days developing nations too are able to offer the same, if not better services in terms of healthcare, technology, and comfort during recuperation and most importantly at affordable prices. As a matter of fact, healthcare costs less in some of these developing nations. This has caused many a person to seek alternate destination to cure their ills outside western countries.

In addition to the ever-increasing cost of healthcare in developed nations, there is also the problem of waiting time. The wait list especially in the UK for both inpatients and outpatients is anything between three weeks to one year. For example, there is a backlog of about 1.2 million patients in major hospitals in Britain alone. The number and wait period increases in non-electric surgery. Non-essential surgery and cosmetic surgery performed by private medical practitioners are prohibitively expensive. Nevertheless, people are clearly interested in image and appearance enhancement medical alternatives. Clearly with

more and more women interested in enhancing their endowments at a reasonable cost, many medical practitioners in these developing countries want to get abreast of the problem.

In view of all these issues, medical tourism has blossomed in many countries as yet another opportunity to get better, look better, feel better, have a good time, see a new place and still have some money left over. And most importantly, they want to have it happens within this lifetime.

The healthcare facilities and the ability of India's healthcare professionals are comparable to some of the best in the world in many areas. This coupled with a stable government with moderate outlooks in many areas and a multitude of holiday destinations make India ideal address for medical tourists. The India Medical Tourism industry although extremely lucrative, faces tremendous challenges from neighbor's i.e. Thailand and Singapore. A sustained effort is needed by the Tourism Board and the Ministry of Health to overwhelm these challenges as soon as they appear. With the pie being as big as it is, India must acknowledge that the competition will mobilize all avenues within its means to garner as much as is possible.

In terms of facilities, we are not in short supply either. India has the right infrastructure, especially when we have comprehensive network of hospitals and clinics. Further, our healthcare professionals are conversant in the English language allowing us to better communicate with the tourists. Moderately conservative figures indicate half a million patients are traveling abroad for health purposes. India with its 5,000 years of medicine has just begun to formally claim its share. Hotels are a key part of the plan. Kerala hoteliers started the trend five years ago with their back water ayurvedic packages. Spas are just the latest phase of the trend.

The true size of the iceberg is always out of sight. Two external agencies, McKinsey and Messe Berlin have painted very bright pictures of medical tourism in India in a short eight years into the future.

QUALITY OF CARE OF THE DOCTORS

Americans and the British are already familiar with highly skilled Indian doctors at their local hospital down the street. What they may not know is that many of these doctors are heading back to India as the living and working conditions here for doctors have changed in the last 15 years or so since liberalization of the economy. India, with its extensive labour pool and extremely educated population is an excellent destination for world class medical treatment. Having had a long association with Great Britain, the English language is prevalent throughout the country.

Two key drawbacks to India, which both the public and private sector are working feverishly to change, are

1. Foreigners are required to obtain a visa to enter the country
2. Many areas outside of the major cities may be unsettling to American visitors who are not accustomed to seeing large scale poverty

This being said, both the hospitals and hotels are totally safe, modern, clean and have world class facilities. During the past few years, many of the top private hospitals in India have build brand new, ultra modern facilities and invested in the latest medical technology in order to lure international patients from around the world.

INDIA BECOMING THE MOST FAVORED MEDICAL TRAVEL DESTINATION

With 8 million tourists in 2012 with an additional of 4 million predicted for 2013, the Indian Tourism Ministry is placing medical travel and tourism on top priority. The National Healthcare Committee and the Indian Tourism Ministry have jointly organized workshops aimed at marketing the country's medical travel industry and Indian medical tourism packages. The focus of these workshops is improvement in the quality and pricing of Indian medical tourism packages, developing competitive strategies and handling litigation issues.

IN INDIA THE STRONG TRADITION OF TRADITIONAL SYSTEMS OF HEALTH CARE IN KERALA

For example, Kerala Ayurveda centers have been established at multiple locations in various metro cities, thus highlighting the advantages of Ayrveda in health management. The health tourism focus has seen Kerala participate in various trade shows and expos wherein the advantages of this traditional form of medicine are showcased. A generic problem with medical tourism is that it reinforces the medicalised view of health care. By promoting the notion that medical services can be bought off the shelf from the lowest priced provider anywhere in the globe, it also takes away the press all its citizens. It is a deepening of the whole notion of health care that is being pushed today which emphasizes on technology and private enterprise. The important question here is for whom is 'cost effective' services to be urea from the government to provide comprehensive health provided. Clearly the services are "Cost Effective" for those who can pay and in addition come from countries where medical care costs are exorbitant – because of the failure of the government to provide affordable medical care. It thus attracts only a small fraction that can pay for medical care and leaves out large sections that are denied medical care but cannot afford to pay. The demand for cost effective specialized care is coming from the developed countries where there has been a decline in public spending ads rise in life expectancy and non communicable diseases that requires specialist services.

INDIA OFFERS WORLD CLASS MEDICAL FACILITIES

Comparable with any other western countries, India has state of the art hospitals and the best qualified doctors. With the best infrastructure, the best possible medical facilities, accompanied with the most competitive prices, you can get the treatment done as India at the lowest charges. A patient will come to India where he will undergo medical treatment and along with that we will show him the Indian tourist and pilgrim destinations, as and when advised by the doctors. The whole thing would save him a lot of money and he will get to discover India at the same time. We assure that we provide the best medical and travel facilities during. As more and more patients from Europe, the US and other well heeled nations with high Medicare package costs look for effectual options. India is rutted against Thailand, Singapore and some other Asian countries, which have good hospitals, salubrious climate and visitor destinations. While Thailand and Singapore with their advanced medical amenities and built-in medical tourism options have been drawing foreign patients of the order of a couple of Lakhs per annum, the quickly growing Indian corporate hospital sector has been able to get a little thousands for cure. The change radically in favor of India, particularly in view of the high eminence expertise of medical professionals, backed by the fast improving tools and nursing amenities and above all, the cost-effectiveness of the pack up.

SWOT ANALYSIS OF MEDICAL TOURISM

Strengths	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality services at affordable cost • Vast supply of qualified doctors • Strong presence in advanced healthcare • International reputation of hospitals and doctors • High confidence level in Indian Doctors • Diversity of Tourism destination and experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No strong initiative to promote Medical Tourism • Customer perception as a hygienic country • Lack of uniform pricing policy • No proper accreditation and regulation system for hospitals • Low coordination between the various players in the industry – airline operations, hotels and hospitals
Opportunity	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase demand for healthcare services from countries with aging population (US, UK) • Reduce / Competitive cost of international travel • Demand from countries with underdeveloped countries • Present an opportunity for hospitals to tap the potential of its potential and leverage its business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong Competition from countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore • Under investment in Health infrastructure • Lack of Proper insurance policy for this sector

THE NEW ECONOMY IN MEDICAL TOURISM

It has now become tourism that the services sector is one of the biggest drivers of the India Economy. But it becomes a concrete reality for us in the bigger metros when we see the upward mobility of disadvantaged sections of the community. Young men and women in urban areas now have the prospect of taking up jobs that can rapidly improve their financial and social status. We are all now seeing the children of our domestic servants getting educated and becoming computer operators or call centre workers. Caste and creed are literally no bar for the sunrise industries, which are just hungrily looking for youth with a basic education and a knowledge of English.

The enthusiasm of private hospital care companies to make such investments stems from several studies which indicate that the substantially lower costs in India compared to developed countries are going to lead to a boom in medical tourism. A study by Ernst and young makes the projection that the medical tourism business may reach as much as two billion dollars annually by the year 2014 from the level of 333 million dollars in 2007.

The study which covers many areas of specialization notes that as far as only one segment, eye care is concerned, the country boasts impressive credentials. With 10,000 eye doctors in this country, the status of eye care and surgery is extremely high. Not only our doctors and eye care centers available in the big cities, it is pointed out that they are also available in smaller towns. Interestingly enough, there are even more Lasik centers in India than in many developed countries. Cost effectiveness and quality are said to be the two factors driving the flow of foreign patients to these eye care centers.

Besides, the cost of treatment in India has been estimated to be on an average one eighth to one fifth of those in the west in most areas of specialization. For instance, the Ernst and Young study has found that a cardiac procedure costs anywhere between 40,000 and 60,000 dollars in the US, 30,000 dollars in Singapore, 12,000 to 15,000 dollars in Thailand and only 3000 to 6000 dollars in India. Besides, surgeries costs are also lower not only due to cheaper rates charged by Indian Surgeons but also because of less litigation here. The cost of malpractice insurance in New York is about 1, 00,000 dollars as compared to 4000 dollars in India. One of the reasons for the growing influx of people seeking medical treatment in this country is the pressure on the health services of developed countries like the US and Europe. In the UK for instance, patients have to wait for months to be given critical operations while the lack of insurance makes medical treatment virtually unaffordable. India also has the potential to emerge as a hub for preventive health screening. A total health check up that could cost 350 pounds in the UK can cost as low as 84 dollars in this country. An MRI costs 60 dollars here compared to 700 dollars in New York.

CONCLUSION

Beauty, youth, and wellness are a huge area for growth and we need to promote the aggressively. Over the past few years alone, many countries have realized that an equally big opportunity lies in promoting the more conventional treatments. Some of this, of course, was always happening in the background – like people from Mauritius, Bangladesh and the Gulf coming to India for conventional surgeries and people from Japan flying to Singapore, Malaysia or Thailand for similar reasons. Only now, the nations have started pitching themselves as world class but inexpensive destinations for almost all health requirements.

Today India becomes the fastest growing economic nation due to the Medical Tourism. India is one of the leading players in the Medical Tourism industry today. It requires overcoming all the weakness and the barriers to become the emerging industry in the coming years.

India is not only cheaper but the waiting time is almost nil. This is due to the outburst of the private sector, which comprises of hospitals and clinics with the latest technology and best practitioners. If India will give more benefits to the foreign patients the patient's arrival will improved fourth coming years. In 2020 the India will be the top leader in medical tourism

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