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MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA- A BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

Mrs Sunanda T. Wagh

(Vice Principal), Head, Department of Statistics,
Arts, Science & Commerce College, Ozar (Mig),
Nashik , 422206

Abstract

Medical Tourism can be defined as the provision of cost effective private medical care in collaboration with the tourism industry for patients needing surgical and other forms of specialized treatments. Medical tourism service is a term used to define the influx of foreign patients for health and medical care packaged with tourism. In India tourists visit India for tourism and medical needs right from heart surgery, dental, ortho-cosmic surgeries to Ayurved & Yoga. The most popular treatments sought in India by medical tourists are alternative medicine, bone-marrow transplant, cardiac bypass, eye surgery and hip replacement. India is known in particular for heart surgery and other areas of advanced medicine. The main reasons behind the enhancement in Medical Tourism are High savings in medical treatment costs, No wait-list, High Quality Treatment, World class facilities, Access to latest technology, Best surgeons, Customer care & Travel opportunities in various exotic places in India. The medical health care facilities are added with advantages of Sight Seeing Tours. Since India has rich cultural heritage, People in India are well coupled with English as a secondary language with this advantage & safe environment the medical tourist experience amazing , pleasant tour at various places. Tourist companies provide many attractive holiday packages before & after surgery at additional competitive cost.

Keywords- Tourism, HealthCare Facilities, Business Opportunities

Introduction-

Medical Tourism can be defined as the provision of cost effective private medical care in collaboration with the tourism industry for patients needing surgical and other forms of specialized treatments. Medical tourism service is a term used to define the influx of foreign patients for health and medical care packaged with tourism. In India tourists visit India for medical and tourism needs right from heart surgery, dental, orthopaedic, cosmetic surgeries to Ayurveda & Yoga. The most popular treatments sought in India by medical tourists are alternative medicine, bone-marrow transplant, cardiac bypass, eye surgery and hip replacement.

India is known in particular for heart surgery, hip resurfacing and other areas of advanced medicine. This process is being facilitated by the corporate sector involved in medical care as well as the tourism industry both private and public. Advantages for medical treatment in India include reduced costs, the availability of latest medical technologies, and a growing compliance on international quality standards, as well as the fact that foreigners are less likely to face a language barrier in India.

A combination of three key factors quality, availability and cost are playing crucial role in developing Indian medical tourism industry. 60% of doctors in India's leading Indian hospitals have international qualifications, thus increasing the acceptance and comfort levels among international patients. An English speaking populace, exotic tourist locations and alternative medicinal cures are some factors that add to the advantage India holds over neighbouring countries.

On the demand side, extravagant high medical costs and lengthy waiting time are the prime drivers in people seeking treatment beyond the home country. Private hospitals and enterprises have driven the spurt in medical tourism. In the year 2013 about 150,000 foreigners travel to India for low-priced healthcare procedures. India's medical tourism sector is expected to experience an annual growth rate of 30%, making it a \$2 billion industry by 2015.

Medical Tourism Scenario in India

Medical tourism is a growing sector in India. The expected annual growth is 30% which costs around 9500 crore. In the year 2012 the value of medical tourism is 2 billion dollar. The medical health care facilities are added with advantages of Sight Seeing Tours. Since India has rich cultural heritage. People in India are well coupled with English as a secondary language. Therefore this language is widely spoken & understood by most of the people. With this advantage & safe environment the medical tourist experience amazing, pleasant tour at various places. Tourist companies provide many attractive holiday packages before & after surgery at additional competitive cost.

The Indian government is taking steps to address infrastructure issues that hinder the country's growth in medical tourism. The government has removed visa restrictions on tourist visas that required a two-month gap between consecutive visits for people from Gulf countries which is likely to boost medical tourism. A visa-on-arrival scheme for tourists from select countries has been instituted which allows foreign nationals to stay in India for 30 days for medical reasons. In Noida, which is fast emerging as a hotspot for medical tourism, a number of hospitals have hired language translators to make patients from Balkan and African countries feel more comfortable while at the same time helping in the facilitation of their treatment.

Maharashtra is the third largest State of India, both in area and population. It is located on the West Coast of India with a 720 km long coastline along the lush green Konkan region. Nestled in the Western Ghats and the Sahyadri mountain range are several hill stations and water reservoirs with semi-evergreen and deciduous forests. The Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, with its dense forests, is home to several wild life sanctuaries and nature parks. Thus all the three regions of Maharashtra offer considerable tourism potential. Maharashtra abounds in numerous tourist attractions ranging from ancient cave temples, unspoiled beaches, ancient forts and monuments, forests and wildlife, unique hill stations, pilgrimage centers, and a rich tradition of festivals, art and culture.

In Mumbai hospital EHIRC, Apollo Indraprastha Hospital, P.D Hinduja National and Medical Research, Jaslok Hospital and Research Center, Ruby Hospitals are the major contributors in catering the health services in Mumbai. Maharashtra has a winning combination of prime tourist destinations and world-class healthcare facilities, which makes it a great choice for a medical tourist centre. After the patient has been treated, the patient has the option of either recuperating in the hospital or at a paid accommodation nearby. Many hospitals also give the option of continuing the treatment through telemedicine.

A separate study by ASSOCHAM reported that the year 2011 saw 850,000 medical tourists in India and projected that by 2015 this number would rise to 3,200,000. Most estimates claim treatment costs in India start at around a tenth of the price of comparable treatment in America or Britain. Recently, patients from countries like Afghanistan have started to travel to India for treatment in large numbers and this is expected to grow even further. The Indian healthcare industry is estimated to double in value to \$6 billion by 2018.

The city of Chennai has been termed India's health capital. Multi- specialty and super-specialty hospitals across the city bring in an estimated 150 international patients every day. Chennai attracts about 45 percent of health tourists from abroad arriving in the country and 30 to 40 percent of domestic health tourists. Factors behind the tourist's inflow in the city include low costs, little to no waiting period, and facilities offered at the specialty hospitals in the city. The city has an estimated 12,500 hospital beds, of which only half is used by the city's population with the rest being shared by patients from other states of the country and foreigners. Dental clinics have attracted dental care tourism to Chennai.

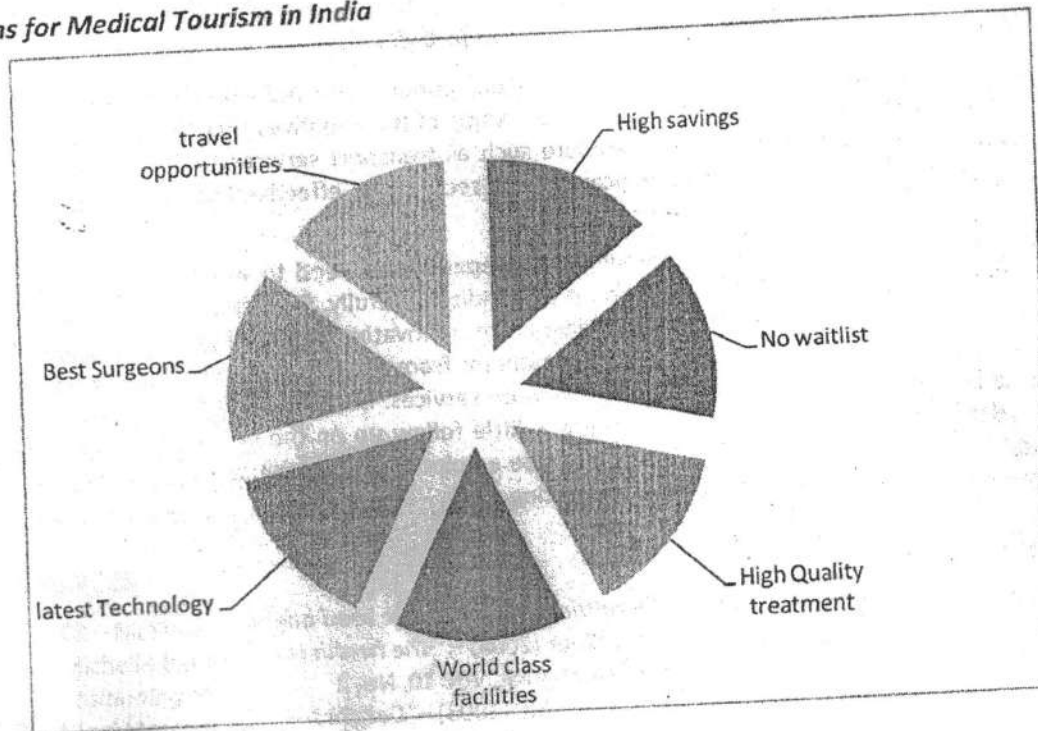
Cost benefit factors in India are-

Medical procedures in India are conducted for as much as one-tenth the cost of a comparable treatment in Developed countries due to the economic disparity.

A bone-marrow transplant which would cost you around \$250000 in the US and 150000 Euros in UK will cost you a mere \$26000 in India. A patient can successfully get a gastric bypass surgery in India by paying just \$9500 as against a \$65000 price tag for the same in US.

Some healthcare companies now offer a package for medical procedures which includes airfare, accommodation charges and visit to some of the holiday destinations.

Reasons for Medical Tourism in India



Why and Where in India

The Medical tourism industry is set to become the next success story after software / IT industry. In the year 2013 about 150,000 foreigners travel to India for low-priced healthcare procedures. India's medical tourism sector is expected to experience an annual growth rate of 30%, making it a \$2 billion industry by 2015.

Maharashtra is the ideal Medical Tourism Hub because of the following reasons

TOURISM

Third largest State of India

Located on the West Coast of India with a 720 km long coastline along the lush green Konkan region. The Western Ghats and the Sahyadri mountains are several hill stations and water reservoirs with evergreen deciduous forests.

The Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, with its dense forests, is home to several wild life sanctuaries and nature parks.

Thus all the three regions of Maharashtra offer considerable tourism potential. Maharashtra abounds in numerous tourist attractions ranging from ancient cave temples, unspoiled beaches, ancient forts and monuments, forests and wildlife, unique hill stations, pilgrimage centers, and a rich tradition of festivals, art and culture.

Medical facilities in Maharashtra

Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra is a major medical Conglomerate for the entire country.

Mumbai offers good international connectivity

3 Joint Commission International recognized hospitals are functional in Mumbai

The combination of all these factors makes Maharashtra a favored destination for Medical Tourism

Strengths of medical tourism in Maharashtra

Indian Doctors are recognized as best in the international circuits

High quality treatment at low cost

Medical Technology, equipment, facilities and infrastructure are at par with international standards.

Doctors and staff are good at English which makes communication for international tourists easier.

Holistic system of healthcare involving ayurveda, unani, siddha and most importantly Yoga are a major attraction for medical tourism.

Future Prospects in development of Medical Tourism in India

Tax incentives for players partaking in medical tourism, import duty reduction on medical equipment, committees to promote and foster medical tourism are some of the initiatives that can be undertaken. There is also a need to develop supporting infrastructure such as transport services to facilitate tourism in the country. The key to development of the medical tourism sector is an effective Public-Private partnership in order to foster growth.

The tourism, health, information and communication departments need to work in tandem for efficient patient care. Legal aspects in health tourism are to be handled carefully. Problems may arise due to severity of the patient condition. Innovation along the value chain: Innovative tour packages on the lines of South Africa and Argentina providing patients kid-glove treatment from the initial stages of diagnosis need to be evolved. One key concern of medical tourists is follow-up services. In most medical tourism countries once the patient departs for home post operation there is little follow up on the part of the hospitals/doctors. Value added services such as follow-up services could be a point of differentiation. The problem of follow up care can be dealt by tele-medicine or video-conferencing.

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