

Leena George*

*Assistant Professor, ISTTM Business School, Email: -

leenaofficial81@gmail.com

***Abstract:**Medical Tourism refers to the people travelling to other countries for medical treatment. Earlier this used to be from less developed countries to the developed ones. But with advancement in technology and health care now, people travel for the best alternative available, in the best interest of the patient with minimum difficulties. Another reason could also be medical services unavailable in one's own country. It is most often for surgeries, specialized or routine, cosmetic or otherwise. People also travel for dental tourism or fertility tourism which is in vogue these days. Travelling for rare medical condition for which better health care is possible. At times the caregiver also needs care in terms of psychiatric help. Counseling is done for alternative medicine, convalescent care and if required assistance is provided for burial services. Health tourism is a broader term for travel focusing on medical treatments and the use of health care services. For the rich and the affluent of the society it covers a wide range of health services conducive to affordability, rehabilitation and wellness.*

The World Health Organization on 30th Jan. 2020 announced a public health emergency of International concern and on 11th Mar. 2020 COVID-19 was declared a Pandemic. Most countries take extreme measures to restrict movements and impose lockdowns to control further transmission and minimize the spread of infection. The number of COVID cases keeps

increasing and the international travel to and from India are restricted. This pandemic has affected us globally. Health, economy, industries, hotels are endangered and threatened; the impact is so deep that it is a threat to the global economy too. The effect of pandemic on medical tourism is multidimensional. It will definitely interfere with patients going to other countries on medical visa thereby impacting healthcare revenue generation to a significant level.

Key Words: travel, health care, wellness, patient, medical tourism

1. Introduction

Medical tourism is a globally occurring phenomenon where people living in one country travel to another country to receive medical, dental and surgical care. Medical tourism is synonymously used for medical travel, health tourism and global health care. Over the last few years there has been a boom in medical tourism, both in practice and in the big wide social media. With the expansion in our global presence it is easier than before to travel to other countries for medical and wellness treatments. At times long wait for medical report results, lab test reports, differences in healthcare regulations and the possibility of quality care elsewhere are the key influencers of travelling for treatment. Cost effectiveness of procedures, advanced technology and better-quality care provided by health institutions are the main factors that drive medical tourism. Economic benefits for the host countries are huge and many countries of the world are trying to attract medical tourists.

2. Need and Importance of the Study

It is important for countries worldwide to have the best of healthcare facilities to increase the life span and to control the mortality rates. And to reduce its mortality rate each country tries its best to provide the best of healthcare amenities and encourages research and development studies in medicine. Talented, efficient and skilled medical expertise is always in demand and need of the hour. This is utilized at its best when medical tourists arrive, get treated, cured and enjoys life again with better health as before.

Medical tourism is a unique concept in travel and tourism industry. It plays an important role in tourism sector. It helps in development of the economy and in the standard of living. It creates more healthcare jobs and facilities. It gives access to latest technology in the medical sector. It improves the quality of life of everyone involved. It increases better global health care standards. There is better knowledge exchange thereby generating foreign revenue.

In the current times global transportation has decreased drastically and therefore absolutely no possibility of patients travelling to other countries for their needed health care, but later on as the world will begin to function and pick its speed, things are not going to be the same. Few countries will develop their health care facilities so good that their patients need not go to better countries for surgeries. Depending upon how affected any particular country is, patients may not choose that nation as an option for medical tourism. Some countries may not issue visas for particular countries depending on the risk involved in International travel to that particular country. The world is going through an economic crisis and

patients may have to give it a second thought if they can bear the cost of medical tourism at the moment.

3. Objectives of the Study

- 1) To understand reasons for medical tourism
- 2) To understand why patients, travel abroad for better health care
- 3) To understand and know various medical travel destinations and its specialization

4. Methodology of the Study

The data collected for the study is mainly from secondary sources. Some sources are as under:-

- Reports from medical travel destination hospitals website
- Relevant journals, manuals, books etc.
- Websites of medical tourism

5. Scope of the Study

This study is purely based on secondary data. i.e. the data which is already available on various research studies conducted on medical tourism. Further, the study is confined to understanding the concept of medical tourism, its destinations and the results of medical tourism.

6. Review of Literature

There are nearly 50 countries globally which have declared medical tourism as a national industry (Lunt and Carrera, 2010). Since different countries follow different types of accreditation and quality standards there are several risks and ethical factors that make medical tourism controversial. Some destinations may become dangerous for medical tourists to travel. It helps to establish peace and better understanding between developing countries, because tourism is the way for different

countries to communicate with each other. Presently, numbers of student volunteers, research and health professionals' trainees from developed countries are working in under developed countries as they are expecting huge boom of work from these countries. The routine procedure is as follows:

The person who wants to undergo medical treatment abroad contacts a medical tourism service provider. Then the healthcare provider asks for patient details such as medical report, nature of ailment, medical history, diagnosis, local doctors opinionated may request some more information. After reviewing all the reports, certified medical doctors or consultants then advise them on the course of treatment. Then depending on patient's financial ability, a choice of hospital destinations, duration of stay etc. are discussed. Then the patient signs a consent bond and obtains recommendation letter for medical visa which is obtained from the concerned embassy. After completing all the formalities, the patient travels to destination country. The medical tourism service provider delegates a service executive. They look after all the needs of the patient right from accommodation, treatment to post-operative care. After the treatment is through, the patient can stay back at the tourist destination for post care treatment or can return home and fall back in routine life (Albuquerque and Prasad, n.d).

7. Current Medical Tourism Scenario

Key motivators:

Influencers are plenty when it comes to deciding whether or not to travel abroad for medical care. Canadian residents travel abroad for a shorter waiting time. Health care abroad could be cost saving and quality care for procedures that may not be available in one's home country. Differences in healthcare regulations of a country, i.e. one can receive drug and treatment options unavailable at home. For e.g. Mexico used to offer experimental treatment unavailable then in Canada. The level of anonymity one wants for treatment is possible. One can relax and recover, complete with the opportunity to enjoy luxurious accommodations and to bring friends and family for the trip (An Introduction to Medical Tourism, 2017).

Where do medical tourists go:

- When choosing a country for a medical procedure, number of factors determine where the patient will ultimately go(Lee and Kim, 2015):
- Geographical proximity, less travel time, ease and less barriers in reaching destination. Patients are not willing to travel long distance and going through complicated visa procedures.
- Cultural closeness in language, religion, cuisines, customs and practices. Often it is the friends or an acquaintance or diaspora population who guides in deciding.
- Destination infrastructure, reputation and treatment level influence patient's perception of a particular treatment facility.
- Apart from treatment costs, travel, accommodations and insurance expenses are also a deciding factor.

Main procedures:

The most sought-after procedures for going abroad are (An Introduction to Medical Tourism,2017):

- Orthopedic surgery (knee and hip replacement)
- Dental implantation and its related surgeries
- Cardiology
- Cosmetic surgery
- Experimental and holistic/wellness treatments
- Retreats, yoga, detox, physiotherapy and its variations as sports medicine.

Revenue in terms of foreign exchange for the host country:

The economic impact of influx of medical tourists from high income countries seeking treatment in less developed nations. Medical tourists tend to stay a little longer, generally travel with larger groups and spend more per capita income, thereby causing rippling effects in the entire economy. Medical tourism brings in higher quality of jobs such as efficient doctors, nurses, anesthesiologists and other related para medical staff. These positions require the best of education and training and hence they are highly paid. This contributes to the economic growth of the country. Those countries do well in medical tourism whose central government actively supports and welcome it (Ibid.).

Future of medical tourism:

It is expected that the number of patients travelling abroad for healthcare and its allied services will rise multiple times in the coming years. Indian government had predicted a growth of \$144 billion USD just from medical tourism between 2016 and 2020 (Ibid.). These numbers were

expected to increase as countries search for alternatives to the healthcare provided at home.

8. Medical Tourism Destinations of the world

As the treatment and service charges of healthcare is increasing in US, residents continue to search for destinations outside the country for affordable and quality healthcare services. Statistics reveal that medical tourism is increasing at the rate of 25% every year and the competition for health tourists between countries become fiercer (VISA and Oxford Economics, 2014). Medical procedures from cosmetic surgery, dental work, orthopedic surgery can now be provided at quality and affordable rates in many countries. Some popular destinations are:

Brazil: According to WHO reports, Brazil is the best service provider in healthcare in Latin America. It has 43 hospitals accredited by JCI having world renowned surgeons. Brazil is known for cosmetic and plastic surgery, is the 3rd most visited country, after China and USA. Brazil offers high quality cosmetic and plastic surgical services at affordable rates, attracting more and more health travelers to the country. Florianopolis and Sao Paulo in Brazil are best known for cutting-edge medical technology, medical advances, and innovation (Stephano, 2018).

Malaysia:It has won the number one spot in the International Medical Travel Journal's award for "Health and Medical Tourism Destination of the year" in 2015 and also in 2016. Malaysia ranks among the best providers of healthcare in all of South-East Asia. Health travelers to Malaysia save 65%-80% cost compared to those in US (Stephano, 2018). Malaysia offers excellent patient comfort with 5-star rooms that look more like hotel suites than hospital rooms. In Prince Court Medical Centre, there are indoor pools

for hydrotherapy. Both Penang international airport and Kuala Lumpur airport has the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC) providing lounge and concierge services to medical tourists to ensure their comfort from the very minute they arrive in Malaysia.

Thailand: It is well known for its unique hospitality and exotic beaches. Having the highest number of internationally accredited hospitals in South-East Asia, it draws a good number of medical travelers each year. It is most reputed for advanced dental work as well as cosmetic and dermatological procedures. Bumrungrad International Hospital in Bangkok, accredited by Global Health Accreditation for medical services, is one of the best hospitals in Thailand, providing advanced healthcare services to over 400,000 medical tourists annually. The rich culture and beauty of Thailand also offers patients private recovery gardens, Thai massage and other forms of relaxation therapies Thailand is known for. Medical services in Thailand saves a patient 50% to 75% on medical expenses they would have incurred for similar services in the US (Ibid.).

Turkey: Another popular destination in the medical tourism market. It boasts of zero waiting times, affordable and quality healthcare delivery. Turkey is known in the areas of transplant surgery, radiation therapy for cancer, orthopedic surgery, neurosurgery, and genomic medicine. The country's national carrier, Turkish Airlines, offers flight rates at discounted prices to medical travelers. Cost of receiving quality healthcare in Turkey is 50% to 65% lower in Turkey than in the United States (Ibid.).

Mexico: It is well known for its rich culture, delicious cuisine, and its good taste for art. Mexico welcomes medical travellers from all over the world. It has 98 hospitals accredited by the country's Federal Health Ministry and

7 hospitals which are JCI-accredited. Mexico is known for its advanced care in dentistry and cosmetic surgery. Medical care in Mexico saves a patient 40% to 65% compared to the cost of similar services in the US (Ibid.).

Costa Rica: As this country rebuilds its economy from the damage that was done by the Tropical Storm some time ago, it is fast rising as a leader in the medical tourism market. This Central American country ranks a high position in dentistry and cosmetic surgery, above Canada and US, consistently in the last few years. With the advancement in technology the country is also building a name in the fields of eye surgery, cancer therapy, and bariatric surgery. Cost of healthcare services in Costa Rica is 45% - 65% lower than in the US, saving patients a lot of money (Ibid.).

Taiwan: It has experienced gradual expansion in medical tourism in the last few years. With advanced treatment of cardiac diseases and orthopedic conditions in the country, Taiwan is on the way to becoming a destination hub in these medical fields. It is the first in kidney transplant in Asia. The National Taiwan University Hospital where the procedure was performed, provides affordable and high-quality treatment for medical tourists. The first ever pediatric liver transplant in Asia was performed by surgeons at the Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, where over 400 of such procedures have been done so far. One can save 40% -55% in healthcare cost in Taiwan compared to the cost of similar services in the United States (Ibid.).

South Korea: It is one of the most tech-savvy and technologically advanced countries in the world. Here patients receive advanced healthcare services with cutting-edge technology from well-trained staff. The Wooridul Spine Hospital in Seoul is one of the best in minimally-

invasive spinal surgery in the country, performing over 20,000 of such procedures every year. This hospital provides luxurious accommodation with spacious rooms, a personal computer, and two beds in case a travel companion comes along with the patient. Tourists are attracted to South Korea because of the insurance coverage offered to medical tourists. The insurance covers injury, stress disorders, and death of a patient which occur as a result of the procedures or treatment they receive. South Korea reduces health cost by 30% - 45% for patients, compared to cost in the United States (Ibid.).

Singapore: It is one of the most developed countries in the world, maintaining the top position in World Health Organization's ranking of healthcare in Asian countries. Gleneagles Hospital is one of the best hospitals in Singapore, offering excellent medical services state-of-the-art facilities and well-trained specialists. Health care in Singapore saves a patient 25% - 40% on the same services in the United States (Ibid.).

Germany: It is becoming a popular destination for medical travellers. Highest quality care, strict ethical standards and easy access to specialists makes it one of the best countries to visit for medical treatment. They have excellent medical equipment, a wide range of specialized medical professionals, and some of the best medical facilities in the world, which has made it one of the best tourism destinations. Germany is not the cheapest medical destination worldwide, but the cost of medical care is lower than many other industrialized nations especially the USA. (Medical Tourism in Germany, n.d.)

United Arab Emirates (UAE): UAE is gradually improving on its reputation as one of the best providers of health services. They have the

best medical professionals and expert team that specializes in plastic surgery, abdominal surgery, dental care and many others. This makes the country one of the known destinations to consider when planning for a medical trip.(Stitt,2017)

As the medical tourism market becomes more competitive and countries invest more in it, these countries remain at the top while more countries spring up in the race to being key players in the industry of medical travel.

Patients seeking medical treatment abroad should not look far away from these countries, as each promises quality care and a relaxing ambiance at an affordable cost. However, patients are advised to make adequate research on the countries and hospitals they seek to visit for treatment checking for international accreditation of the hospitals, quality and standard of care provided, and the skills of the needed medical professionals.

Whichever country one prefers for medical travels, it is important to understand that destination is less important than finding the right treatment for a certain condition. There is no compromise on care just to visit a certain country.

9. Medical Tourism Destinations of India

India has been known over the years as a historical medical tourism destination, visited by health travelers seeking to heal themselves through Ayurveda. Since the last 10 years India has grown to become a sought-after destination for medical tourism. Today, India is one of the top 10 medical tourism destinations in the world. Latest healthcare amenities, skilled

doctors and reasonable cost of treatment has made India a popular hub of medical tourism attracting number of patients every year.

India's medical value travel revenue recorded \$3 billion in 2015. It received 4.95 lakh medical travelers during the year 2017 as against 4.27 lakh in 2016 and 2.34 lakh in 2015. With an estimated growth rate of around 20 per cent over the next two years, India's medical tourism industry is expected to be worth \$9 billion by the year 2020. Bangladesh and Afghanistan are the top two countries from where the maximum number of medical tourists arrived in 2017. Around 2.2 lakh tourists from Bangladesh and 56,000 from Afghanistan arrived in India for medical purpose. (Zutshi,2019)

Chennai: Chennai is one of the most developed urban cities. Recent survey estimates about 40% of the people choose Chennai for high quality treatment with low cost. Chennai receives about 200 foreign patients every day(Swot, 2020). In addition to heart surgery, orthopedics, and other medical procedures and treatments are given. Most popular treatments like alternative medicine, bone-marrow transplant, cardiac bypass, eye surgery and hip replacement are carried out regularly in some of the best hospitals in Chennai.

Mumbai: Mumbai is the fastest growing medical destination in India. There are many specialty Hospitals, Diagnostic & Research center for weight loss surgery(bariatric), cosmetic surgery, Orthopedic Surgery, Cancer treatment. Also known for the cosmetic surgery and Ayurveda treatment.

Goa: Goa is considered as the best holiday destination of India. It is also a growing medical destination of India. There are multiple specialty

hospitals that attract the international patients. It is famous for Surgery like heart bypass, hip replacement and spinal fusion. Goa Government supports all the health and wellness tourism available in the state.

New Delhi: India's capital Delhi has numerous award-winning and prestigious hospitals like Fortis Hospital, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital and Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals. These and other private hospitals specialize in neurosurgery, heart surgery, eye surgery and also joint replacement and general surgeries and various other treatments.

Bengaluru: Some of the best hospitals in Bengaluru is known for ultra-modern medical equipment, which is on par with the best available in the world. It is also famous for stomach related surgery. With the best doctors available performing complex surgery is less risky.

Ahmedabad: Ahmedabad is the fastest growing medical hub. Many NRI's prefer Ahmedabad for their medical treatment as there is numerous world class hospitals. Famous hospitals such as Civil Hospital (Asia's largest civil hospital), Sterling Hospital, Apollo Hospital, Shalby Hospital, SAL Hospital, Rajasthan Hospital amongst others are present in Ahmedabad.

Coimbatore: Coimbatore is best known for heart surgery and ENT treatments. VGM, KMCH, PSG hospitals are famous for its high-quality treatment at a reasonable price.

Vellore: This city is known for many famous hospitals like Christian Medical College & Hospital and VIT University. It is also a major city for medical tourism. Vellore is known well for treatment of Cardiology and Cancer.

Alleppey: This city in Kerala, Alleppey is famous for Ayurvedic treatments, and treatment are given for allergy and cosmetic surgery.

Famous hospital in Alleppey are Star Hospital, K.G. Hospital Angamaly, Madonna Hospital.

Hyderabad: People choose this city of pearls in Telangana for medical tourism as the hospitals in Hyderabad offers best treatment at an affordable price. Treatment like plastic surgery and Reconstructive surgery are made at reasonable cost. Featured hospitals for medical treatment are Heritage Hospital, Aditya Hospital, Live life hospital, Apollo hospital, Care hospital, Yashoda hospital and KIMS hospital.

The abundant talent of health experts, travel and tourism at reasonable cost, availability of advanced technology, cost-effective treatments, tradition and trending market availability, highly facilitated and well-equipped hospitals, are the special features of India, which plays the essential role in promoting India as a global healthcare destination. In developing countries like India, the healthcare clinics are ready to lower the cost of treatments which directly influences the economic status of the country. Service quality is responsible for attracting more customers. Quality in terms of services of hospital staff including doctors, nurses towards the patient.

10. Medical Tourism Opportunities and Initiatives in India

India has a rich cultural heritage. It's diversities of culture and exotic destinations is an attraction to international travelers. Medical travel offers a combination of pleasure, luxury and quality healthcare for medical patients coming to India for health care options.

Realizing this vast potential that the medical tourism market offers, it is now one of the priority areas of facilitation by the government. The

vision and intention of the Central Government to promote and develop India as a medical tourism destination can be understood from the fact that, now four ministries i.e. Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of AYUSH along with SEPC and NABH are actively involved (Zutshi, 2019).

The Ministry of Tourism has also established a National Medical and Wellness Tourism Promotion Board to look into issues such as regulatory affairs, accreditation and marketing. The industry has also taken multiple initiatives for marketing and promoting Indian healthcare in key overseas markets and India at international platforms such as WTM London, ITB Berlin, FITUR Madrid and ATM, Dubai. Yoga, Ayurveda and Wellness are also finding prominence in print, electronic, online and outdoor media under the *Incredible India* campaign.

11. Suggestions

Medical tourism is considered as a prominent pillar in the growth of health care industry because of the revenue it generates. Its growth in the last decade has definitely influenced overall growth of health care sector. Due to multidimensional impact of COVID-19 in the form of health crisis, falling economy, cessation of international travel followed by restricted international travel with due risk of infection, medical tourism industries globally are going to suffer for a substantial time to come.

Like any other industry, this sector will also take time to recover. Small steps towards revival are very important for this sector to stay alive. It is important that the government brings in standardization into health care system exclusively for medical tourism for the reliability and trust

among international patients. Considering the fall in global economy a revised treatment charge planning is also advised.

India deserves a larger share of the medical value in travel opportunity. For making India a destination of choice for medical tourism for countries beyond South Asia and the Middle East, medical value travel stakeholders in India need to consolidate their efforts, design strategy to utilize the available opportunity and address certain key issues.

Some such issues and strategies, for consideration of the Government, industry and other stakeholders are: India stands low in its regulatory regime compared to its competitors. The current regulatory regime needs to focus on some critical aspects like timely issuance of medical visa and registration of medical facilitators; the high cost of medical visa in India can discourage medical travelers from coming to the country. The present structure of medical visa fee needs to be revisited and rationalized; the more accredited hospitals a country has, the better its positioning in the global medical tourism arena. India must therefore aim to get more JCI and NABH accredited hospitals in the near future.

12. Conclusions

COVID-19 is a challenge to mankind in all possible ways. It has brought nations, economy and industries into a standstill for some time. Almost all nations are going through lockdown and cessation of international travel. Though basic activities and industries may resume working, the impact is going to last for a long time. Medical tourism is going to face a definite lag in its estimated growth due to the impact of pandemic. It is essential for all countries catering medical tourism, along with globally recognized

hospitals and health care services to plan and act towards minimum damage and maximum recovery from the pandemic. It may need revision of medical visa rules, revision of health care standard and treatment charges.

India needs to be more ‘tourist-friendly’ for medical tourists coming to the country by way of ease of services at airports, faster immigration clearance for medical tourists, ambulance services at airports, proper transport infrastructure, affordable accommodation, food as per a patient’s requirement, hygiene and an environment of holistic care.

India is on the right path to becoming a destination of choice for medical tourism. India today, is rightly called ‘the pharmacy to the world’. In order to achieve the stated vision of being ‘the provider to the world’ by care at affordable cost, combined effort by all key stakeholders including the government, health & tourism industry, service providers, facilitators and regulators is the need of the hour. (V. Zutshi, 2019)

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