



MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA- A REVIEW ARTICLE

¹Dr. Anand Chaudhary*, ²Dr. Vinayak Chauhan

¹Assistant Professor, Department of medicine, Adani Institute of Medical Science, Bhuj,
Gujarat.

²Assistant Professor, Department of medicine, Adani Institute of Medical Science, Bhuj,
Gujarat.

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*Correspondence for

Author

Dr. Anand Chaudhary

Assistant Professor,
Department of medicine,
Adani Institute of Medical
Science, Bhuj, Gujarat.

ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of time, Man has been curious, and this curiosity has taken him far and wide. People travel across the world to see different places, sometimes for pleasure, sometimes for work and knowledge. With the cut-throat competition in every field, the stress and numerous health problems faced by people due to their unhealthy eating and sleeping patterns, people have now begun to grasp the

importance of vacations. Medical tourism is a term initially coined by travel agencies and the mass media to describe the practice of traveling across international borders to obtain health care. Today, a large number of health care providers are migrating overseas, thus compromising the treatment provided here. Hence by promoting medical tourism, countries are urging doctors to come back to promote medical tourism as well as provide equitable health care in their country. The trade in health services is expanding, becoming more competitive, and creating new dimensions of globalization, all elegantly packaged, and sometimes actually functioning, as the new niche of medical tourism.

KEYWORDS: Health, Globalization, Medical, Tourism.

INTRODUCTION

People travel across the world to see different places, sometimes for pleasure, sometimes for work and knowledge. With the cut-throat competition in every field, the stress and numerous health problems faced by people due to their unhealthy eating and sleeping patterns, people have now begun to grasp the importance of vacations. It helps people de-stress, escape from their everyday worries, spend valuable time with family and relax.

Health tourism is an ancient concept. Just as people have always wanted to travel to visit the wonders of the world, so people have long wanted to take the waters at a spa, be seen by a Harley Street specialist, go as a pilgrim to a holy place because the spirits there could soothe and heal. Even the ancient Greeks went to Epidauria because of the health-giving god Asklepios. The ancient Romans went to thermal baths because warm water is good for the joints. Patients have sought health care outside their native countries for many years, so in this sense, "medical tourism" is nothing new.^[1]

Medical tourism (also called medical travel, or health tourism) is a term initially coined by travel agencies and the mass media to describe the 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.^[2,3]

In today's fast paced and competitive world, where even a day's absence from work, leads to loss of wages and opportunities, it is more practical that a person who is already on vacation, combines his treatment with pleasure, as he also finds the time to recuperate, along with the treatment. Also, with the rise in economy, people now seek for places where treatment can be provided at cheaper rates. Thus, a hike in medical tourism has been seen.

Tourism is travel for recreational, leisure or business purposes. It is a collection of activities, services and industries that delivers a travel experience, including transportation, accommodations, eating and drinking establishments, retail shops, entertainment businesses, activity facilities and other hospitality services provided for individuals or groups traveling away from home. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) claims that tourism is currently the world's largest industry with annual revenues of over \$3 trillion dollars. Tourism provides over six million jobs in the United States, making it the country's largest employer.^[4, 5]

The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as people "traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes".^[6]

HISTORY

Wealthy people have always travelled to distant parts of the world, to see great buildings, works of art, learn new languages, experience new cultures and to taste different cuisines. Long ago, at the time of the Roman Republic, places such as Baiae were popular coastal

resorts for the rich. The word *tourist* was used in 1772 and *tourism* in 1811. In 1936, the League of Nations defined *foreign tourist* as "someone travelling abroad for at least twenty-four hours". Its successor, the United Nations, amended this definition in 1945, by including a maximum stay of six months.^[7]

Winter tourism

Although it is acknowledged that the Swiss were not the inventors of skiing, it is well documented that St. Moritz, Graubünden became the cradle of the developing winter tourism; since that year of 1865 in St. Moritz when many daring hotel managers choose to risk opening their hotels in winter. It was, however, only in the 1970s when winter tourism took over the lead from summer tourism in many of the Swiss ski resorts. Even in winter, portions of up to one third of all guests (depending on the location) consist of non-skiers.

Major ski resorts are located mostly in the various European countries (e.g. Andorra, Austria, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Czech Republic, France, Germany Iceland, Italy, Norway, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Sweden, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey), Canada, the United States (e.g. Colorado, California, Utah, Montana, Wyoming, New York, New Jersey, Michigan, Vermont, New Hampshire) New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, Chile, and Argentina.

Mass tourism

Mass tourism could only have developed with the improvements in technology, allowing the transport of large numbers of people in a short space of time to places of leisure interest, so that greater numbers of people could begin to enjoy the benefits of leisure time. In the United States, the first seaside resorts in the European style were at Atlantic City, New Jersey and Long Island, New York. In Continental Europe, early resorts included: Ostend, popularised by the people of Brussels; Boulogne-sur-Mer (Pas-de-Calais) and Deauville (Calvados) for the Parisians; and Heiligendamm, founded in 1793, as the first seaside resort on the Baltic Sea.

Leisure travel

Leisure travel was associated with the Industrial Revolution in the United Kingdom – the first European country to promote leisure time to the increasing industrial population. Initially, this applied to the owners of the machinery of production, the economic oligarchy, the factory owners and the traders. These comprised the new middle class. Cox & Kings was the first official travel company to be formed in 1758.

The British origin of this new industry is reflected in many place names. In Nice, France, one of the first and best-established holiday resorts on the French Riviera, the long esplanade along the seafront is known to this day as the *Promenade des Anglais*; in many other historic resorts in continental Europe, old, well-established palace hotels have names like the *Hotel Bristol*, the *Hotel Carlton* or the *Hotel Majestic* – reflecting the dominance of English customers.

Many leisure-oriented tourists travel to the tropics, both in the summer and winter. Places of such nature often visited are: Bali in Indonesia, Colombia, Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Malaysia, Mexico the various Polynesian tropical islands, Queensland in Australia, Thailand, Saint-Tropez and Cannes in France, Florida, Hawaii and Puerto Rico in the United States, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Saint Maarten, Saint Kitts and Nevis, the Bahamas, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Turks and Caicos Islands and Bermuda.

GROWTH OF MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

The countries where medical tourism is being actively promoted include Greece, South Africa, Jordan, India, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore. India is a recent entrant into medical tourism. According to a study by McKinsey and the Confederation of Indian Industry, medical tourism in India could become a \$1 billion business by 2012. The report predicts that: "By 2012, if medical tourism were to reach 25 per cent of revenues of private up-market players, up to Rs 10,000 crore will be added to the revenues of these players". The Indian government predicts that India's \$17-billion-a-year health-care industry could grow 13 per cent in each of the next six years, boosted by medical tourism, which industry watchers say is growing at 30 per cent annually.

In India, the Apollo group alone has so far treated 95,000 international patients, many of whom are of Indian origin. Apollo has been a forerunner in medical tourism in India and attracts patients from Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The group has tied up with hospitals in Mauritius, Tanzania, Bangladesh and Yemen besides running a hospital in Sri Lanka, and managing a hospital in Dubai.

Another corporate group running a chain of hospitals, Escorts, claims it has doubled its number of overseas patients - from 675 in 2000 to nearly 1,200 this year. Recently, the Ruby Hospital in Kolkata signed a contract with the British insurance company, BUPA. The

management hopes to get British patients from the queue in the National Health Services soon. Some estimates say that foreigners account for 10 to 12 per cent of all patients in top Mumbai hospitals despite roadblocks like poor aviation connectivity, poor road infrastructure and absence of uniform quality standards.

Analysts say that as many as 150,000 medical tourists came to India last year. However, the current market for medical tourism in India is mainly limited to patients from the Middle East and South Asian economies. Some claim that the industry would flourish even without Western medical tourists. Afro-Asian people spend as much as \$20 billion a year on health care outside their countries - Nigerians alone spend an estimated \$1 billion a year. Most of this money would be spent in Europe and America, but it is hoped that this would now be increasingly directed to developing countries with advanced facilities.^[8]

Promotion of Medical Tourism

The key "selling points" of the medical tourism industry are its "cost effectiveness" and its combination with the attractions of tourism. The latter also uses the ploy of selling the "exotica" of the countries involved as well as the packaging of health care with traditional therapies and treatment methods.

In India the strong tradition of traditional systems of health care in Kerala, for example, is utilised. Kerala Ayurveda centres have been established at multiple locations in various metro cities, thus highlighting the advantages of Ayurveda 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.

The important question here is for whom is 'cost effective' services to be 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 and rise in life expectancy and non-communicable diseases that requires specialist services.^[8]

Response to medical tourism

The American Society of Plastic Surgeons, the first medical organization to address medical tourism, posted a briefing paper on its Web site in 2005 providing information to patients considering cosmetic surgery in foreign countries.^[9] In 2006, other medical organizations began to pay attention to medical tourism, responding with notices on their Web sites and presentations at meetings to provide information and opinions to the public and to their membership. In June 2006, the United States.

Senate Special Committee on Aging held hearings on the issue of medical tourism subsequent to which the Chairman, Senator Gordon Smith, called for a task force of experts to explore the impact and safety of lower cost health care abroad.^[9] American manufacturers and insurance companies are studying and pursuing offshore health care options in an effort to reduce health care costs. Mercer Health & Benefits, a prominent employee benefits consulting firm, has been retained by three Fortune 500 corporations to determine the feasibility of directing elective major surgery to foreign medical destinations.^[10] Currently, Blue Shield of California and Health Net sell discounted health insurance policies that encourage patients to get most of their care in Mexico, and United Group Programs, a third-party administrator, is promoting elective surgical care in Thailand.²⁵ In West Virginia, legislation was introduced that would provide financial rebates to state employees who seek health care at medical tourism destinations. Although the original bill did not make it out of committee in 2006, the issue has been reintroduced in the 2007 legislative session (HB 2841).^[11]

Medical Tourism in India is a million dollar booming business, drawing loads of overseas patients. Medical Travel India is projected to capture 2.5% of the International Medical Tourism Market by the year 2012, with concurrent revenue projects of \$ 2.3 billion. It has been estimated, that the Medical Tourism Industry in India will attract over 1.1 million patients from across the globe, by the end of 2012.^[12,13]

Medical Tourism Agencies in India

Various agencies like Medical Tourism Corporation (MTC) look in to each and every section of the Medical Value Trip, with the minutest detail. They help make travel to India trouble-free, comfortable and pleasurable, they arrange for the best and most proficient hospital services, and makes accessible to you, the deftest, best trained and the most experienced doctors and medical team. The tiniest feature of the trip to India, right from obtaining visas / permits, making comfortable hotel accommodations, hospital costs for the treatment, doctors'

fees, ride to and from the health center, to the airfare and transport services and arranging for sightseeing, within the country, is handled brilliantly by the agencies like MTC. Hospitals within the network of the agencies, have specially designed guest suites to comfortably house the patient and the accompanying guest. Also, they make arrangements with various hotels that promise round the clock nursing and care for post-discharge patients. Heading to a beautiful and quiet locale after the procedure, facilitates quicker recovery, and helps you to rest, and enjoy a beautiful vacation at an interesting location.

If one plans to seek health care abroad, India is unquestionably one destination that you ought to think about. There couldn't be a better place than India to recuperate and unwind. Medical Tourism in India is an absolute package of health care, wellness, sightseeing, discovering a new destination, pleasure, and loads of savings. Medical Tourism Corporation facilitates medical treatment to top Hospitals in India.^[14]

CONCLUSION

Medical tourism has been particularly attractive to elites, even perhaps especially in developing countries. Despite the presence of traditional therapies within Indian medicine the medical market is now increasingly oriented towards high-end tourism.

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