



A Comprehensive Review On Medical Tourism In India

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Abstract

India, as a developing nation, offers medical services at a more affordable rate compared to many developed countries. This has attracted numerous tourists seeking medical care through various Indian healthcare options. The country is renowned for its practices such as Yoga, Ayurveda, Unani, Homeopathy, Siddha, and spiritual healing, alongside hospitality services in locations like Mooligai Hills. The Indian government provides multi-specialty medical services to the public at lower costs. Additionally, state and union territory governments extend healthcare services to both residents and non-resident Indians (NRIs). The private sector has also significantly contributed to the healthcare landscape, offering high-quality medical services as both corporate entities and public utilities, often at reasonable prices, supported by government health insurance schemes. India's healthcare infrastructure is increasingly attracting international patients, leading to a rise in medical tourism. This sector has become a vital component of the Indian economy, contributing to GDP growth, with medical tourism representing a significant share of economic resources distributed across the nation. Notably, cities such as Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai, and Vellore in Tamil Nadu have become popular destinations for foreign patients seeking treatment in both government and private hospitals, yielding positive outcomes. This article discusses previous research on health tourism in India.

Keywords: medical tourism, healthcare, medical services, medical tourists

Introduction

Globalization has facilitated the rise of tourism as one of the most rapidly expanding sectors within the service industry. When tourism is pursued for the purpose of obtaining medical care, it is termed medical tourism. This sector holds significant potential and could emerge as a major source of foreign exchange for India. Medical tourism is an expanding market, with numerous countries competing for a share of the global medical tourist population. Not long ago, the concept of medical tourism was relatively unknown, and the integration of healthcare services with travel seemed unlikely. Traditionally, tourism was associated with leisure activities devoid of obligations, while hospitals were linked to discomfort and suffering. As one author remarked, “the dentist chair and the antiseptic smells of a hospital waiting room are synonymous with pain and a sense of helplessness. They just don’t blend with travel and vacations” (Ross, 2001). Nevertheless, it has become evident that medical tourism is rapidly gaining traction.

Goodrich and Goodrich have characterized medical tourism as “the attempt on the part of a tourist facility or destination to attract tourists by deliberately promoting its healthcare services and facilities, in addition to its regular tourist amenities.” This form of tourism is primarily motivated by the cost advantages offered in the destination country or the superior quality of treatment available compared to the tourist's home country. It has been noted that medical tourists predominantly originate from industrialized nations such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, and Canada, where medical expenses are high and waiting times for treatment are lengthy. These individuals often travel to countries like Thailand, Singapore, India, Malaysia, South Korea, Brazil, Belgium, Hungary, and Jordan, which provide medical services at lower costs alongside appealing tourist attractions.

India has long been recognized as a hub for traditional medical practices, including Yunani, Ayurveda, homeopathy, and naturopathy. Throughout history, numerous travelers have journeyed to India to explore these ancient healing methods. In contemporary times, various states have developed expertise in specific medical services. For instance, Kerala and Karnataka are renowned for their Ayurvedic treatments, Uttarakhand is known for its yogic practices and meditation, Delhi excels in cardiac and orthopedic care as well as other allopathic treatments, and Chennai is distinguished for its eye care services. Additionally, Karnataka, Kerala, and Uttarakhand are home to some of the most attractive tourist destinations in India.

Research Objectives and Methodology

This paper seeks to analyze the increasing trend of medical tourism in India. The analysis focuses on the expansion, potential, and challenges encountered by the healthcare sector in relation to medical tourism. A descriptive examination of various themes associated with medical tourism has been conducted. The primary objectives of this document can be categorized into three main areas:

1. Assessment of the current status of medical tourism in India
2. Factors contributing to the growth of medical tourism in India
3. Future outlook for medical tourism in India

A comprehensive search for studies published up to 2023 was conducted across databases like Google Scholar, J-Store, ProQuest, and Research Gate, using keywords such as “Medical Tourism,” “Healthcare,” and “India.” This yielded 440 articles, including duplicates. After removing 220 duplicates, 100 articles were assessed for relevance based on criteria including English language, coverage of at least one Asian country or India, and indexing in ProQuest, EBSCO, and SCOPUS. An additional search identified 20 more articles, whose full texts were obtained.

Review of Literature

Medical tourism accounts to be one of the fastest growing sub-sectors of the tourism industry. India's healthcare facilities and surgical procedures are comparatively more satisfactory than other South-Asian nations. India positioned to be the third most preferred destination for medical tourism amongst 184 countries of the world and the GDP growing by 7.9 percent per annum (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2017). The Quality of services provided in India was much low budgeted with respect to the western economies. The price differential for various medical procedures provided by India, Malaysia, Thailand and U.S.A has clearly revealed the monetary advantage offered to the foreign patients.

The price disparity between India and other foreign countries for different medical procedure exhibits that India possesses a greater economic advantage. For instance, heart bypass surgery cost 18 times more in the United States and approximately twice in Thailand which exhibits India's comparative advantage over other foreign destinations (India Tourism Report, 2010).

According to Connell (2006), India publicizes itself as the global centre of medical tourism by offering alternative Ayurvedic therapy to coronary bypasses and cosmetic surgery. Institutes such as Breach Candy, Hinduja, Fortis Escort, Apollo and Yashoda Hospitals along with Hyatt, J.W. Marriot, Ayurvedic Village, Carnoustie Ayurveda and Wellness Resort in Kerala are well known for their high-end healthcare services at Pan-India and global level for safety, trust and excellence (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2017)

In recent years the growth of medical tourism in India has been remarkable. According to surveys conducted by ASSOCHAM (The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India) and NSSO (National Sample Survey Organization) the market size is likely to more than double from Rs 4500 crore in 2011 to Rs 10,500 crore (US\$2 billion) by 2015; the inflow of medical tourists which stood at 3 lakhs in 2009 rose to 8.5 lakhs in 2011 and is likely to touch 32 lakhs by 2015)

The cosmetic surgery industry includes dental care, plastic surgery, breast enhancement, tummy reduction etc. The advanced and life savings healthcare includes open transplants, cardio-vascular, eye treatment, in-vitro fertilization (IVF) etc. The medical services in India that attract international attention predominantly include dental and eye care treatment, orthopaedics and trauma, cardiac care including surgery, urology, neurosurgery, plastic and cosmetic surgery, laparoscopic surgery, gastroenterology, kidney transplant and knee/hip surgeries

There are many reasons for the growth of medical tourism in India. The primary reasons cited for this are the cost advantage which Indian health care sector enjoys in comparison to other countries. Along with cost advantage the services are offered by internationally experienced specialists. This mixture of world class facility at affordable cost makes India one of the top five most favored medical tourist destinations in the world. India is also endowed with world acclaimed tourist destinations. India provides wide range of tourist destinations with natural beauties (Jammu, Srinagar, Shimla, Dehradun, Kerala backwaters, beaches of Chennai, Mumbai, Goa, Kolkata etc.) heritage sites (Western ghats, Sunderbans, Nilgiris, Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta caves) spiritual destinations (Varanasi, Haridwar, Bodh Gaya, Ajmer Sharif, Churches of Goa) and Metropolitan cities (Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad). This gives the tourists visiting India a variety of options to include along with the treatment of their ailments

Heung et al. (2010), developed an integrated model to determine the factors which directly affects the decision-making of the potential medical tourist. The model takes into the consideration both the demand and supply aspect of the tourist. Demand aspect was mainly determined by the combination of various sub-factors viz. economic cost, distance/location, political stability, hospital reputation. The supply side was determined by sub-factors viz. infrastructure, promotion and quality of healthcare facility. Chanda (2013), concluded destination selection process as essential factor by medical tourists. The purpose for taking vacations may have different motive and may vary from person to person. Factors which motivates medical tourist for vacation is safety (economic and political), adventure, social interaction, low cost, hospital reputation and communication (Crompton, 1979; Mayo & Jarvis, 1981)

Medical tourism was not just confined to the particular sector; rather it extends its wide spectrum of benefits to other sectors viz. Business and economics. Medical tourism significantly contributes to the foreign investments, informational technology services and business exports which presently act to be the largest and prominent contributor to the nations GDP (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2017). In India, tourism and medical hospitality sector's contribution to GDP are projected to grow at 7.9 percent per annum from 2016 to 2026. Tourism and hospitality sector in India report for 9 percent of total employment opportunities for the year 2016, delivering employment to around 38.4 million people. Medical tourism as an instrument helps in shaping the society of a nation. The ascent of medical tourism helps the developing nations in enhancing the healthcare facilities, better infrastructure, increasing income and employment opportunities etc. and on the other hand, developed nations gain the advantage of being a prominent tourist destination

Recommendations

India needs to promote its medical tourism industry and in this respect certain steps to be taken by the country and its citizens. These include:

1. Build better infrastructure facilities in the country like more super-specialty hospitals, better railroad network within the country and air transport within and outside the country.
2. Take steps necessary to stop/reduce the Brain Drain process of doctors.
3. To make the journey of foreign nationals to our country hassle free and fast. This includes providing assistance from the start of journey till they leave the country. Visa-on-arrival can be provided to medical tourists. The Indian embassy in foreign countries can coordinate with the hospitals and officials in the country.
4. Promoting 'Brand India' through better marketing and advertising strategies.
5. Only few states are today leading in attracting medical tourists in the country. Government should promote other states in developing the state of art facility

Discussion and Conclusion

Medical tourism is recognized as a burgeoning and specialized market that is attracting the interest of developing economies worldwide. Despite its reputation as a thriving and lucrative industry, there remains a scarcity of literature addressing this phenomenon within the Indian context. The objective of this study was to explore the various antecedents related to individual factors, such as country selection, hospital selection, and doctor availability, as well as provider-related factors, including infrastructure, certification and accreditation, and accessibility and communication, and to examine how these dimensions are interconnected with medical tourism and inclusive growth.

To achieve this, a comprehensive review of scholarly articles and other academic resources was conducted, leading to the development of a conceptual model of medical tourism that elucidates its relationship with inclusive growth. This model encompasses both individual-related and provider-related factors, providing a holistic view of medical tourism. It emphasizes determinants such as economic status, cost, and specialized expertise that influence individuals' decisions regarding country selection, hospital selection, and doctor availability. Furthermore, the model illustrates how the choices of medical tourists are influenced by provider-related factors, including the modernization and security of infrastructure, the certification of hospitals by reputable agencies, and the impact of language barriers on communication and accessibility at the chosen destination. Ultimately, the conceptual model delineates how these factors moderate the relationship between medical tourism and inclusive growth.

Consequently, the findings of this study are objective and consistent with previous literature. Both individual-related and provider-related factors are positively associated with medical tourism, contributing to India's emergence as a preferred destination.

Future empirical research should concentrate rigorously on the micro and niche areas of medical specialties, such as coronary artery bypass, peripheral vascular disease, retinopathy, neuropathy, nephropathy, and organ transplantation. Additionally, medical tourists are increasingly considering medical ethics as a significant aspect, examining the motivations behind patients' decisions to travel and assume risks. Consequently, upcoming studies should incorporate multiple dimensions, including robustness, a focus on specialized medical fields, medical ethics, and post-healthcare utilization.

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