Emerging Trends of Wellness and Medical Tourism in India

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ABSTRACT

India is a leading health tourism destination attracting patients as medical tourists from all over the world. Health tourism is a provision of private healthcare in collaboration with the government and the tourism sector. India has a competitive advantage over other countries engaged in health tourism in combining traditional Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddhi, and Homeopathy (AYUSH) with allopathic medicine and complex high-end of medical surgeries such as cancer, cardiac, and hip and knee replacements. This chapter will identify the factors driving the growing economic importance of wellness and medical tourism to India, opportunities, and challenges in developing India as a global healthcare destination.

INTRODUCTION

Developing country as India is a leading health tourism destination attracting patients for wellness tourism and medical tourism from all over the world. India has a competitive advantage over other countries engaged in medical tourism, in combining wellness type of traditional medicine such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddhi and Homeopathy (AYUSH) with modern allopathic medicine and complex high-end of medical surgeries such as cancer, cardiac and hip and knee replacements. Medical tourism is provision of cost effective elective and complex surgeries in collaboration with the government, private medical hospitals and the tourism industry for patients.
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seeking diagnostic, elective, cosmetic, dental and reproductive treatments, along with having a holiday for rest and recovery at an attractive destination (Brotman, 2010; Gupta, 2008; Medhekar & Ali, 2012; Singh, 2008; Sultana, Haque, Momen, & Yasmin, 2014).

Global travel for healthcare tourism phenomenon is driven by globalisation, privatisation and outsourcing of healthcare and internet communication technologies (Horowitz & Rosensweig, 2007; Runnels & Tuner, 2011; Smith, Chanda, & Viroj, 2009). Developing countries such as Thailand, India, Malaysia, South Africa, Brazil, and South Korea, are popular destinations for outsourcing medical treatment overseas such as dental, eye, cancer, orthopaedic and cardiac due to world class hospitals and highly skilled and overseas trained medical professionals (Awadzi & Panda, 2006; Baliga, 2006; Bookman & Bookman, 2007; Connell, 2013; Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 2014). In 2009, India ranked second after Thailand as a healthcare destination in number of medical tourist arrivals (IMT, 2009).

Medical tourism is an economic activity that involves trade in healthcare related services from the medical and tourism sectors of the economy (Bookman & Bookman, 2007). Jones and McCullough (2007) have described medical tourism as “international economics in action” (p. 1077) as patients seek first world quality and state-of-the-art medical technology and innovative surgical procedures in developing countries at an affordable prices (Crooks et al., 2011; Medhekar, Wong & Hall, 2014; Turner, 2007). Potential patients as wellness or medical tourists search for information on the internet websites of private hospitals, medical tourism facilitators and government health tourism portals before they make a decision to travel abroad for treatment (Lunt, Hardey, & Mannion, 2010; Medhekar & Newby, 2013; Moghavvemi et al., 2017). The main objective of the health tourists is to improve their health, wellbeing and quality of life.

According to Connell (2006), “India is capitalizing on its low costs and highly trained doctors to appeal to these medical tourists” (p.1), besides promoting thousands of years old attractions of heritage and cultural tourism. The success of health tourism sector can be quantified by number of inbound wellness and tourists travelling on medical visa (M-visa) and amount of foreign exchange revenue generated. Health tourists not only spend on healthcare related goods and services, but also spend on local travel, accommodation, sightseeing, shopping and hospitality sector.

The number of overseas patients granted with medical visa, for medical tourism to India is on the rise. Foreign patients as medical tourists visiting India is growing at the rate of 30% a year since 2012. In 2012, nearly 1,71,021 medical visas were issued which increased to 2,36, 898, in 2013 and 2,01,333 in 2016 to 361,060 in 2017 (IMTJ, 2017a, 2017b). The medical visas issued by the Indian Embassy in Oman is on the rise by 100% from 5255 M-visas and 3,902 medical attendant visas in 2015, rising to 11,613 M-visa and 8,491 medical attendant visas in 2016 (IHCO,
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