

MEDICAL TOURISM - A PATH TO ECONOMIC SUPPORT IN 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Now a day's Medical Treatment become very expensive in developed countries. Due to unaffordable towards treatment, Patient in developed countries is searching hospitals where they can get good treatment with less investment. Most of these patients travel from developed countries to developing countries, seeking highly invasive medical treatments to less invasive and recreational medical procedures. Medical tourism is the travel of people from one place to another place for the purpose of obtaining medical treatment. Coming from one place to another place for health care purpose along with the patient is also known as health or medical tourism. Medical tourism comprises an experience where over five million patients a year are traveling across international borders to obtain various forms of health care (Patients beyond Borders, 2011; Woodman, 2007). By the year 2014, the medical tourism industry generated over \$120 billion with over 50 countries making it a priority in trade for their country (Hansen, 2008). With active government promotions, India has become one of the leading destinations for medical tourism. The objective of the study is to understand the real reason for medical tourist coming to India and its contribution to exchequer. This study is limited to Soukya Holistic Health Center, Bangalore rural.

Key Words: Medical Treatment, Tourism, Affordable, Invasive, Destination Challenges.

Introduction

Medical tourism (also called medical travel, health tourism or global healthcare) is a term initially coined by travel agencies and the mass media to describe the rapidly-growing practice of travelling across international borders to obtain health care. It also refers pejoratively to the practice of healthcare providers travelling internationally to deliver healthcare. Over 50 countries have identified medical tourism as a national industry. However, accreditation and other measures of quality vary widely across the globe, and there are risks and ethical issues that make this method of accessing medical care controversial. Also, some destinations may become hazardous or even dangerous for medical tourists to contemplate. Medical tourism has become a multi-billion dollar industry. According to McKinsey and Company, medical tourism was a \$60 billion market in 2006 and it has been predicted that it could be a \$120 billion industry after seven to eight years (Hansen, 2008). Despite its recent popularity, medical tourism is thousands of years old (Hancock, 2006). Goodrich (1994) points out that different form of medical tourism have existed for centuries. Written records of Greeks traveling to Tell Brak, Syria, for eye treatment date back 5000 years (Gahlinger, 2008). During ancient times, people from afar frequented mineral springs due to their purported healing nature. People traveled for healing from ailments such as skin conditions, arthritis, and muscular injuries. People in ancient times have always gone to rivers such as the Nile, Ganges, Yangtze, and Jordan to be cleansed physically and spiritually (Goodrich, 1994). Medical tourism today is much more diversified, both technologically and geographically. Medical tourists travel to distant locations around the globe for treatment. Over 50 countries have identified medical tourism as a national industry. In past decades, affluent people from developing countries came to developed areas such as the U.S. and European countries for medical treatment. Most of these patients came to the West to attain highly advanced medical treatments that were not available in their home countries. However, a reversal is taking place. People from developed countries are traveling to developing countries such as India, South Africa, and Thailand to receive medical treatment. Although many of these patients are traveling to receive highly advanced medical procedures, a significant amount of them are also pursuing more less advanced and holistic types of treatments. According to Johnston et al. (2010), most of the hospitals that promote medical tourism are within lower and

middle income countries (LMICs), “where favorable exchange rates have given them a competitive advantage in attracting price-conscious international patients.”

Review of literature

Medical tourism is a burgeoning industry. According to Hopkins et al. (2010), medical tourism is “a rapidly emerging manifestation of global commercialization of health care” (p. 185). Gupta (2008) writes that “medical tourism is a multi-billion dollar industry promoted by governments and the medical and tourism industries” (p. 4). Although some forms of medical tourism may be century’s old, medical tourism in the twenty-first century is different from any previous characterization.

Methodology

This research uses data from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data has been collected personal interview with the help of pointing scale technique questionnaire. Study covers medical tourists and several health care management officials and support staff. Interviews of the medical tourists sought to understand why and how they chose to attain medical treatment at the Soukya Holistic Health Center. Interviews of health care management officials sought their opinions on medical tourism and information on how they promote their facilities as medical tourist destinations. Total respondents of twenty-five have been considered randomly for the study.

Brief Profile of Soukya Holistic Health Center, Bangalore

Soukya Holistic Health Center is located just outside the city of Bangalore in a rural setting. It combines modern medicine with ancient techniques and complementary therapies. Using multiple treatments and a holistic approach, Soukya’s goal is to treat patients in mind, body, and soul unlike most hospitals, which deal only with the body (soukya.com). The concept of therapeutic landscape plays a key role at this facility. It is set on a large organic farm that promotes simplicity among nature. All their lodgings, although modern, give a pristine and isolated feeling. Many of the building have traditional Indian thatched roofs and the use of natural elements is widespread. The facility itself is set well outside the city of Bangalore. This allows patients to be treated in a quiet, less polluted setting away from the hectic streets of the city. Several patients from the other study sites, all located in the city, mentioned the traffic, noise, and pollution as problematic. Surrounded by gardens, trees, plants and farm animals, this health center believes in the concept of a therapeutic landscape in promoting healing and good health. Although many Indians frequent the health center, it is well known for having a large foreign clientele. Over the years, the health center has attracted notable celebrities from around the world. Most foreign patients at Soukya are from Western Europe and the U.S.

Front elevation of Soukya Holistic Health Center



Figure 3.8 Soukya Holistic Health Center, Bangalore

Source: Soukya Website.

Analysis and Interpretation

The views from the respondents have been collected on the standard and quality of doctors, post admission care, expenditure, and availability of need based treatment, and coverage of insurance facility. Out of the total respondents 44 percent are patient and other 56 percent belongs from patient's relatives, attendants, officials (doctors, and directors of the hospital), and others (Para-medical staffs).

Table: 1 Status of Respondents

Status	Number/s	Percentage
Patient	11	44
Attendants	05	20
Officials	06	24
Others	03	12

Source: Compilation of data

Table: 2 Views of the Patient Respondents on the Reason for Coming to this Place

Parameters	Extremely good	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Average	Mean
Quality of Doctors	18	64	09	09	00	3.91
Quality of medical hospitality	45	37	18	00	00	4.27
Affordable cost of treatment	09	37	27	18	09	3.18
Easily availability of specific treatment that have not been available in the own country	18	27	46	09	00	3.55
To compensate with the insurance claim	9	73	18	00	00	3.90

Source: Compilation of data.

To find out the reason for coming outside to have the treatment, the patients of the sample hospital has been approached and the views against the various parameters are shown in the above table. That 18, 64, 09 and 09 percent patient considering themselves that quality of doctors of sample hospital are extremely good, very good, good, and satisfactory respectively as per their choice. With regard to post admitted hospitality extended by the hospital to the treating patient, 45 percent feels extremely good, 37 percent very good and 18 percent good. That 09, 37, 27, 18, and 09 percent patient opined that the cost of treatment extremely good, very good, good and average respectively and easy to afford. Against the question of non-availability of need based specific treatment at their own country, the 18, 27, 46, and 09 percent respondents according to the scaling have been considered the sample hospital. With regard to compensate of expenditure with the insurance reimbursement the 9, 73, and 18 percent respondents opined that the sample hospital is extremely good, very good, and good likewise. From the above it can be concluded that hospital tourism is well associated with the good doctors, post admission hospitality, and cost of treatment of the medical institutions. The total mean value in this respect is 3.76 indicates high degree of significance.

Table: 3 Views of the Attendant Respondents on the Reason for Coming to this Place

Parameters	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Average	Mean
Quality of Doctors	00	40	40	20	00	3.2
Quality of medical hospitality	40	20	40	00	00	4.00
Affordable cost of treatment	60	40	00	00	00	4.6
Easily availability of specific treatment that have not been available in the own country	60	20	20	00	00	4.4
To compensate with the insurance claim	60	00	20	00	00	4.2

Source: Compilation of data

The views from the attendants of patients have been collected on the same parameters that had had been asked to the patient. To understand the reason for coming as a medical tourist, the opinions of the attendants have been collected and they indicate that due to reasonable treatment cost, easily availability of specific treatment and compensate of expenditure with insurance claim they are coming from their place. In all the cases the 60 percent attendants opined positively and the mean value comes to 4.02 and that1 indicates very high degree of positive significance. With this it can be concluded that medical tourists are generally coming from their place to get medical facilities due to less financial burden.

Table: 4 Views of the Official Respondents on the Reason for Admitting of Patient

Parameters	Strongly Acceptable	Acceptable	Moderate	Satisfactory	Average	Mean
Quality of Doctors	50	33	17	00	00	4.33
Quality of medical hospitality	67	33	00	00	00	4.67
Affordable cost of treatment	50	33	17	00	00	4.33
Easily availability of specific treatment as per the need	33	50	17	00	00	4.16
To compensate with the insurance claim	67	33	00	00	00	4.67

Source: Compilation of data

Apart from the views of patients and their attendants the opinions of doctors, directors of the sample hotels have obtained on the same parameters. With regard to the quality of doctors 50 percent respondents expressed their strongly acceptance and 33 percent expressed their acceptance on the subject matter. In respect of medical hospitality after the admission of the medical tourists 67 and 33 percent respondents have attributed their feelings on the way of strongly acceptance and acceptance respectively. The mean value with regard to treatment cost and insurance claim is 4.67 that depicts that medical tourists are more interested with the cost of treatment. The total mean value on the views of the officials is 4.43, it indicates high degree of links between medical tourist and medical expenditure, quality of doctor, need based facility, and post hospitality.

Table: 5 Views of the Para-medical force on the reason for admitting of patient

Parameters	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Average	Mean
Quality of Doctors	100	00	00	00	00	5.00
Quality of medical hospitality	33	67	00	00	00	4.33
Affordable cost of treatment	67	33	00	00	00	4.67
Easily availability of specific treatment	100	00	00	00	00	5.00
To compensate with the insurance claim	00	100	00	00	00	4.00

Source: Compilation of data

The above table depicts the views of the Para-medical force of the sample hospital on the same five parameters. 100 percent respondents opined that in their hospital the doctors are excellent. With regard to quality of medical hospitality 67 percent rated very well on the subject. In respect of availability of need based specific treatment 100 percent opined positively. The total mean value is 4.6. With this it can be concluded that in the eyes of Para-medical staff the medical tourists are coming from one place to another place to get medical treatment because of doctors, hospitality, treatment cost and need based treatment.

Conclusion

Medical tourism, although a fairly new observable fact in its current form, has grown strongly both in terms of the revenue it generates and the geography of its distribution. As medical tourism grows, more and more people will have access to it in this globalized world where health care has become a very important issue. More than 50 countries are involved in promoting medical tourism. In the developed countries the expenditure is more and the insurance reimbursement is not compensating the cost of expenditure, and in the under developed countries are

not having adequate medical facilities for which medical tourists are moving to have the same as well as better facilities with less expenses in the developing countries. During the discussion some of the patient disclosed that their family physician is recommendation the name of the sample hospital. Besides medical treatment, travelling for pleasure on the same trip along with the family members/attendants is another factor. From the above analysis it comes to the picture the main and important factor relates to the medical tourists are the cost of medical treatment. Medical tourism industries become an income growing sector at present. If this industry can get the help from the government in respect to the laws of medical tourist then the industry become a path for economic growth.

Limitation

This study is limited to twenty five respondents of a single hospital. The views of the respondents cannot be considered unbiased. The period of study is limited to two weeks only. Further study in this area highly called for.

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