

Chapter 1

Global Medical Tourism: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Medical tourism is related to the travel of patients from one country to another in order to obtain medical treatment in that country. There are several countries worldwide promoting medical tourism and attracting patients. Most of the developing nations attract the patients because of cost benefits whereas the developed nations attract patients who require complex surgeries or any kind of advanced medical treatment. The main aim of this research paper is to focus on the development of medical tourism industry, worldwide. Medical Tourism industry throughout the world is growing at a fast rate. It has huge potential for generating employment and earning large amount of foreign exchange. This will help in the country's overall economic development. Medical tourism incorporates multi-dimensional activity but basically it is a service industry. Hence, medical tourism is a vital revenue earning source especially for the developing nations. Hence, it can be said that it is a win situation for both the patients as well as the destination countries.

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INTRODUCTION

Medical tourism refers to the practice of travelling to different countries in order to obtain health care facilities. It also refers to the practice of healthcare service providers travelling worldwide to deliver world class healthcare facilities. The services that the travelers are looking for include simple procedures as well as complex specialized surgeries such as cardiac surgery, dental surgery, joint replacement (knee/hip), and cosmetic surgeries. Nowadays, every type of health care, including alternative treatments, psychiatry, convalescent care and even burial services are also provided. In most of the cases, service providers and customers commonly enter informal channels of communication connection contracts. This is very helpful for both the parties because it means less regulatory or legal hassles to assure quality services for reimbursement or redress, if needed. There are about 50 countries worldwide which have declared medical tourism as a national industry. Since different countries across the globe follow different types of accreditation and quality there are several risks and ethical issues that make medical tourism controversial. There are certain destinations which may become dangerous for medical tourists to travel. The medical tourism also helps to establish peace and a better understanding between the developing countries, because tourism is the best way for the different countries to communicate with each other. Currently, a large number of student volunteers, researchers and health professions trainees from developed countries are working temporarily in third world countries as they are expecting huge boom of work from these areas. The general procedure of medical tourism is as follows: First of all, the person who wants to undergo medical treatment abroad contacts a medical tourism service provider. Then the healthcare provider asks for the patient details such as medical report, nature of ailment, medical history, diagnosis, local doctor's opinion and may request additional relevant information. After reviewing all the reports, certified medical doctors or consultants then advise them on the course of medical treatment. Then depending upon the patients financial constraints, a choice of hospitals destinations and the duration of stay, etc., are discussed. Then the patient signs a consent bond and obtains a recommendation letter for a medical visa which is procured from the concerned embassy. After completing all the above formalities the patient travels to the destination country. The medical tourism service provider assigns a service executive. They look after all the needs of the patients starting from accommodation, treatment to postoperative care. After the treatment is over, the patient can stay back at the tourist destination for post care treatment or can return back home.

NECESSITY OF MEDICAL TOURISM

There are no accurate statistics regarding the global medical tourism market. From the information available in public domain, we can conclude that an increasing number of patients are traveling to developing nations to avail healthcare. In 2004, nearly 1.2 million patients traveled to India to avail healthcare facilities and 1.1 million medical tourists traveled to Thailand for the same. In 2007, approximately 750,000 Americans had opted for offshore medical services. This number has increased to 6 million in 2010. It was earlier predicted that medical tourism market in Asia will grow to \$4.4 billion by 2012 and India will be a topmost medical tourism destination. It has been earlier predicted that the global medical tourism industry has a potential to generate annual revenues up to \$60 billion, with an annual growth

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