

Chapter 21

The Development, Nature, and Impact of Medical Tourism in Bangladesh

Azizul Hassan

Tourism Consultants Network, the Tourism Society, UK

Mojib Uddin Ahamed

University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Muhammad Shoeb-Ur-Rahman

University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

ABSTRACT

Medical tourism is recent phenomenon. All such tourism is based on three main factors (tourists, service providers and facilities, and the policy frameworks required to put these together), that contribute to its development. Bangladesh has put these main factors in place for medical tourism, and now wishes to make better use of available service providers and facilities. The country is believed to have the capacity to become a major medical tourism destination, if its development is properly orchestrated. Bangladesh produces a considerable number of medical tourists, however the country has in recent years witnessed huge investment in public and private medical services, and health infrastructure development. This chapter is an analytical study that aims to explore the existing patterns of medical tourism in Bangladesh, while offering suggestions that would allow the country to gain a competitive edge.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism as a practice engages travelers with diverse activities and in many instances these evolve into basic demands rather than mere leisurely inclinations. This becomes particularly evident when tourists are sick and vulnerable but have lower access of treatment within their own country. Medical tourists tend to modify their travel in order to receive medical treatments. ‘Medical Tourism’, also known as ‘Health Tourism’ or ‘Wellness Tourism’, is a newer type of niche market in tourism (Smith & Kelly,

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2006; Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Connell, 2013). All such new niche tourism is based on a chain reaction of three main factors (the tourists, the service providers and facilities, and the policy frameworks required to put these two together), who each contribute individually to this collective phenomenon in their diversified roles. Bangladesh has the 2 of the 3 main factors, and wishes to attract tourists who might seek to make use of the available service providers and facilities.

This chapter particularly focuses on the emerging role of Bangladesh in terms of both inbound and outbound trends in medical tourism. The country is believed to have the capacity to turn into a major destination of medical tourism interest if its development is properly orchestrated. At present, Bangladesh produces a considerable number of medical tourists, who find their ultimate destination not only in the neighboring countries of South Asia, but also across the entire world. However, the country has on the one hand witnessed huge investment in medical services and health infrastructure development from both the public and private sector in recent years. While on the other, alternative medical practices such as Ayurveda (herbal remedies and massage) are a well-established in-country resource. The primary purpose that this form of tourism normally serves is to obtain treatment in areas of medical, surgical, cosmetic, dental, orthopedic or related. Medical tourism offers treatments during the time of tour, vacation or visit and is widely growing as a popular concept across the World. This type of tourism enables tourists from one country to go to another to meet and access specific offers in areas of healthcare or treatment. The basic fact is that, healthcare or medical facilities differ in countries across the world, and there is a constant shift towards consumers demanding better treatment at lower cost. Characteristically, the development of medical tourism in a specific destination relies on certain factors such as industry focused information sharing, easier transportation, the existence of ancillary tourism facilities, and in general higher quality of service offers.

Medical tourism is generally popular in both developed and developing countries and gradually taking shape as a valid branch of tourism (Brown, 2008; Gray & Poland, 2008; Waikar, Cappel, & Tate, 2011). This chapter specifically concentrates on Bangladesh as a destination for both outbound and inbound medical tourists. Medical tourism is still a niche market in Bangladesh with immense potential and obviously with limited capacities. However, this type of tourism is receiving attention in terms of existing facilities, and possible areas of investment. The interrelations between medical and other forms of tourism are thus becoming noticeable. The growth of this kind of tourism is necessarily intertwined with the development of related areas with examples like sustainable tourism, urban tourism and many more (Hassan & Forhad, 2013). It is obvious that the acceptability of medical tourism by travelers is unquestionable where, seemingly, they are more willing to visit destinations across the world that can offer medical or healthcare and tourism facilities in an appropriate similar manner than stay at home. The objective of this conceptual discussion is to analyze the development of medical tourism in Bangladesh with particular reference to its current nature and probable impacts. The study also makes some key suggestions to help policy construction in the acceleration of the development of this sector.

MEDICAL TOURISM: CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

The simplistic definition of medical tourism is travelling for medical purposes (Ninian, 2008). As identified by Lee & Spisto (2006), medical tourism has four components: 'Medical' through treatment of illness, 'Enhancement' through cosmetic surgery, 'Wellness' through spa or alternative therapies, and 'Reproduction' through IVF and associated therapies. Medical tourism typically covers areas of treat-

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