

Chapter 18

Potentials and Prospects of Medical Tourism in Chennai, India

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ABSTRACT

Medical tourism or as it is often called, Health Tourism or Medical Travel, has emerged as million-billion dollar industry. Medical tourism is the practice of traveling outside one's home town to access medical treatment. The concept of Medical Tourism in India refers to visit by overseas patients for medical treatment and relaxation. Medical tourists choose India as their favourite destination because of the key opportunities in Indian healthcare sector in the form of efficient infrastructures and technology. The health insurance market and National medical systems here are well developed, which is convenient for visitors from the West and the Middle East. They also find the hospital expenses very affordable. The Tamil Nadu region is proud of possessing India's best medical facilities (Allopathy, Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and so on). Chennai leads in the Indian health care sector and is considered the Health Capital of India, and suitable subject for this Chapter on medical tourism in India.

INTRODUCTION¹

Medical tourism or Health tourism is also known as medical travel. Medical tourism is the concept of travelling to a particular destination to avail the patient of the opportunities for world-class healthcare services offered by the best experienced professionals, at the technologically most advanced medical facilities, in complete privacy and at an affordable cost. The healthcare procedure is usually combined with a family vacation. The concept of medical tourism is not a new one. The first recorded instance of medical tourism dates back thousands of years when Greek pilgrims travelled from the Mediterranean to the Saronic Gulf to a place called Epidauria. This has become the original travel destination for medical tourism. Spa tourism and sanatoria may be considered an early form of medical tourism.

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Medical tourism or global healthcare is a term initially coined by travel agencies and the mass media describes the rapidly-growing practice of travelling across international borders to obtain health care. Over 50 countries have identified medical tourism as a national industry (Shaywitz & Ausiello, 2002). Medical Tourism in India refers to visit by overseas patients for medical treatment and relaxation. Medical tourists choose India as their favorable destination because of the key opportunities in Indian healthcare sector in the form of efficient infrastructures and technology. The health insurance market and national medical systems here are well developed, which is convenient for visitors from the West and the Middle East. They also find the hospital expenses are very affordable. In fact Medical tourism is experiencing high annual growth rate, and government bodies in India, such as the Ministry of Tourism, have initiated a range of programs to encourage and market medical tourism. It includes marketing campaigns, improved airport and transportation services, and tax incentives. India's medical tourism sector is expected to experience an annual growth rate of 30 percent.

The city of Chennai is the home to some of India's best health care institutions such as Apollo Hospitals, the largest health care provider in Asia. MIOT Hospitals, Sankara Nethralaya, Sri Ramachandra Medical Center, Fortis Healthcare, Sundaram Medical Foundation (SMF), Madras Medical Mission (MMM), Frontier Lifeline & K.M. Cherian Heart Foundation, Chettinad Health City and Adyar Cancer Institute, Chennai is a preferred destination for medical tourists from across the globe. Some of the treatments sought after by the tourists include heart surgery, neurological problems, cancer, plastic surgery and orthopaedic procedures. Chennai attracts about 45% of all health tourists arriving in India from abroad in addition to 30% to 40% of domestic tourists.

MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA: AN EMERGING INDUSTRY

The medical-tourism market in India is estimated at 333 million dollars (The Hindu Chennai, 15 March 2014) and is growing at 30 per cent per annum. According to a study by Mckinsey and the Confederation of Indian Industry, medical tourism in India could become a 2 billion dollar business by 2015 (Devashish, 2011). It is estimated that nearly 15,000 foreigners have been treated in India in recent years. The Ministry of Tourism has requested all the state of Tourism Departments to promote medical tourism through suitable packaging of identified best hospitals and price banding for various specific treatments. Moreover, guidelines formulated by Department of AYUSH, to prescribe minimum requirement for Ayurveda and Panchkarma Centers have also been circulated to all State Governments (Gupta & Sharma, 2008)

Hi-Tech Healing Opportunities

Hi-tech medical facilities have become a necessity demand among the world's fastest growing middle class. India offers at its own doorstep, a range of world quality hospitals and treatments at a fraction of world costs with comparable success rates and service levels directly in proportion to the high value system and natural caring that comes with its millennia heritage. Indian hospitals are becoming known internationally for standards of health care (Chatak, 2010). India boasts of several good private owned hospitals with facilities second to none. They have some of the best doctors, with most top end being educated in USA and UK. More and more people have started traveling to India for Medical Treatment and during the past year alone, over 150,000 people travelled to India for their medical requirements.

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