



## Prospective growth trends of medical tourism in India –Key challenges towards policy interventions

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**Abstract :** Medical tourism or also known as health tourism is a fast growing tourism sector in India. Along with globalization people visiting India is also increasing & nearly there is a 30% increase in the number of foreigners visiting India for medical treatment. Cost effectiveness, global standard of treatment, Visa relaxations, affordability, treatment etc attracts these tourists to India. Even India government is giving them a red carpet welcome with Visa relaxations. But the health sector in India is reeling under the fist of private sector. Medical tourism has become a money spinner for corporate sector. While millions of Indians are suffering from basic health amenities, Indian government is devising various mechanisms to attract foreigners to India in the name of Medical tourism. This paper focuses on the Impact of medical tourism on Indian economy, threats faced by the medical tourism sector & reflects on the need for an integrated policy through government.

**Key words :** Medical Tourism, commercialization of health care sector, private sector mediation, need for government intervention

**Introduction:** Health related issues across the globe are changing with them the problems of baby boomers, aging population, child less population, third gender, increasing chronic disorders. Serious commercialization of the health care industry is another important factor which is plaguing the sector.

**Concept of medical Tourism:** It is a form of tourism which refers to travelling of people from one country to another country for obtaining medical treatment of that country. Medical Tourism is growing at a high speed it nearly 30% increase in 2015. It is reported that nearly 3,50,000 people visited India for medical care treatment in India during 2013-14. Even the National health Policy of 2002 supports medical tourists. Indian government is attracting medical tourists with tax concessions, visa relaxations, subsidies etc

### Advantages of medical tourism in India –

The increasing number of medical tourists is expanding every day as there is several adjoining desirability factors in India for these tourists.

1. **Cost effectiveness-** The cost of treatment in India is 30% less than compared to western countries. For instance an ailment as a heart surgery, hip transplant might more than 10 lakhs in Britain or USA but is costs only 2 lakhs in India. Hence affordability with personalized attention is a major attraction for these tourists.

2. **Reliability on perfect health care experiences of Indian doctors :** India has a good lineup of great specialist doctors, consultants, professionals, dedicated medical staff. These teams provide good health treatment hence they are reliable. The consistency & professionalism of



Indian doctors is praised all over the world.

3. **Availability of latest medical technology aided treatments** . Indian medical care sector is providing International quality standard treatment , medical Visa assistance , spinal surgeries, complimentary post operation consultations , tele-conferencing facility , facilities of ultra modern neurology treatment , VIP transfers such as free transport from airport to hospital & vice versa , timely cure facility , free translation services.

4. **overnmental support** : government is also supporting foreign Medical tourists .There are no visa restrictions on tourist visas. Visa on arrival schemes where people can stay in India for 30 days for medical care. Medical visa are given on spot with clearance

5. **ranslation services** - Hiring of translators in hospitals English speaking doctors , Para medical staff & attendant staff is a very important factor in

6. **ivate corporate sector involvement**- private corporate sector involvement is driving foreign nationals towards India.

7. **peedy treatment**- speedy treatment with less waiting time is another key factor in attracting foreign tourists.

8. **ltra modern facilities** – Today majority of the super specialty & specialty hospitals offer Ultra modern facilities. The best & the latest in health care are available in these hospitals which attract foreign tourists.

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9. **olistic healing techniques** - Indian health care system is not only dependent on technological upgraded medicine hot spot it is an amalgamation of holistic healing techniques. In India holistic healing treatments Ayurveda yoga & naturopathy treatments attract people across the globe. Thus there is a perfect blend of traditional & modern technique of caring . Table-1 shows the growing trends of medical tourists

year	foreign tourists visiting India for treatment
2005	1,50,000
2008	2,00,000
2010	8,50,000
2015	3,200,000

**Source** : Report of the ASOCHAM 2015

**Popular medical treatments** – India is providing several types of global standard treatment medical tourists

1. Bone marrow transplant treatment
2. Heart cardiac bypass



3. Eye surgery
4. Hip replacement
5. Heart surgery
6. Hair transplant
7. Infertility treatment

Besides Chennai has a great number of medical tourists coming from all over the world because Chennai has great number of expert doctors & health care chain. Besides, following are the famous medical tourism destinations of India

1. Chennai
2. Goa
3. Mumbai
4. Bangalore
5. Delhi

**Focal hot spots :** Chennai is the health capital of India with 45% of the health tourists come to Chennai (Confederation of Industrial units of India The report 2015 ) At Apollo specialty hospital orthopedic patients come from US Canada Australia Italy & middle east .

The following ( table -2) countries visit for medical treatments which are in great demand.

Bypass	Hip transplant	Knee replacement	cosmetic face lift
USA, Italy , Hungary ,UAE Bangladesh	Singapore , Malaysia , Korea, Egypt ,Italy ,Oman	Mexico, Korea UAE , Belgium, Czech Republic,	UAE , Singapore , Brazil , Turkey ,

Source : Report of the ASOCHAM 2015

### Threats

1. **Impact on availability of specialized doctor services :** As corporate sector is involved in affording medical treatment good doctors are hired by these companies. Hence government hospitals & clinics are suffering from lack of specialized doctor services.
2. **Increased privatization-** Health care sector is privatized & is largely at the mercy of private sector funding. This is a great threat to the industry as private sector medical companies are demanding more tax concessions , land , water & other infrastructure & the profit so earned is not invested in India but it is taken outside India . Hence India is deprived of its seed capital returns .
3. **Impact of regional medical challenges**  
As global health indicators indicate

India is still suffering from mal nutrition & under nourishment. Children aged 0-5 years are suffering from diarrhea , mal nutrition etc & India is reinventing medical tourism with surrogate motherhood which is a ridiculous. Indian children are dying for lack of food & facility & foreign women are welcomed here for conceiving with new technology. India has to look towards strengthening basic medical support system & then channelize on foreign tourists. ( National health policy 2015 Ministry of Health & family welfare , Government of India , New Delhi 2015 ).

4. **Increased neglect of locals health care issues-** Medical tourism is attracting foreign tourists for cosmetic surgeries



while Indians suffering from acid attacks, burns injuries are left to die as the medical treatments are sky rocketing & beyond their expenditure limit.

**5. Increased privatization pre-judicial treatment:** Indian health sector is plagued by biased treatment priorities. Private hospitals charge exorbitantly for poor Indians. Most of these hospitals do not even give entry to weaker sections. Poor people who sale off their entire properties to get good medical treatment, lose their life, yet do not receive good timely treatment for their ailments. One of the major reasons for poverty in rural areas has been the insufficient medical aid.

**6. Increased corporate priorities:** Corporate hospitals reserve specified number of beds for poor & weaker sections but this does not address the problem. Indian tax payer's money is being utilized for building these sky raise hospitals but these hospitals deny treatment to Indian citizens. The corporate run hospitals enjoy heavy subsidies, tax benefits, free landscapes at through away prices.

**7. Impact of delay in government interventions:** Government interventions are needed to rectify these anomalies. The government should stop giving red carpet welcome to corporate health companies. 9 National health policy 2015 Ministry of Health & family welfare, Government of India, New Delhi 2015).

### Lessons from CUBA

Medical tourism has been a great income generator in Cuba. Cuban government controls the hospitals & health care management. There are hospitals for

Cuban citizens & foreign medical tourists. While Cuban citizens get free medical aid all through the year, foreign tourists pay for the treatment. The fees thus paid is reinvested on boosting medical care amenities. (J Garg All is not well with Medical tourism in India - Indian Journal of Community health in India vol. 38 No 1 Jan -March 2013).

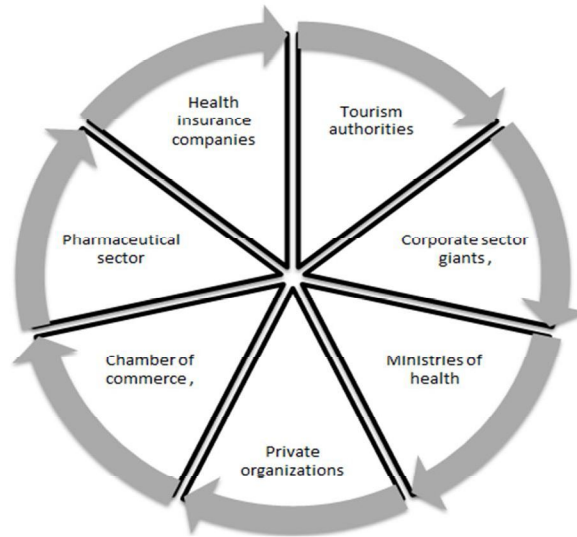
**Stakeholdership challenges** - One important impediment causing negative effect to Medical tourism is the absence of one single premier brand of medicines. Lack of India brand of medicines is the greatest obstacle for medical tourism. As shown in Chart-1 there is a need for combining all related health affinities to come together in policy formulations. The combined efforts of Tourism authorities, corporate sector giants, ministries of health, private organizations, chamber of commerce, pharmaceutical sector, health insurance companies should debate together & arrive at a common understanding for devising an integrated health policy. (National health policy 2015 Ministry of Health & family welfare, Government of India, New Delhi 2015). International standard certification is needed to synthesize quality of health care treatment. Affirmative coalition with health insurance companies is required. Medical tourism can flourish with tourism transport operator facility IT specialists. Para medical support, quality & experienced medical experts, hence establishing a coordination among all of these key players is very essential. (Jugal Kishore - National health programs of India- century publications 2012).

India as a nation of 1.2 billion people is suffering from several health related



issues hence medical tourism should not become a priority. National health needs are still unmet. health care is unaffordable to millions. Health related issues across the globe are changing with time the problems of baby boomers , aging population ,child less population ,

third gender increasing chronic disorders. Heavy commercialization of the health care industry is another important factor which is plaguing the sector. Draft National health policy released by Ministry of Health & family welfare also envisages this.



**Conclusion** : Thus Indian Medical tourism sector is suffering from several short falls. This is the right time that Indian government looks up at providing medical aid to Indians instead of red carpeting foreign medical tourists .

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