

LETTER TO EDITOR

India - An Emerging Epicenter of Medical Tourism*Annadurai Kalaivani^{1*}, Mani Geetha¹, Danasekaran Raja¹**¹Department of Community Medicine, Shri Sathya Sai Medical College & Research Institute, Sri Balaji Vidyapeeth, Kancheepuram district-603108 (Tamil Nadu) India*

Dear Editor,

Medical tourism refers to the act of traveling to another country to seek specialized or economical medical care, well being and recuperation of acceptable quality with the help of a support system. The concept of medical tourism dates back to thousands of years, Greek pilgrims travelled to Saronic Gulf called Epidauria, sanctuary of the healing god Asclepius [1]. In modern era, during recent past it was the patients from the developing countries who used to travel to industrialized countries for quality medical services. But the trend is reversing now, with more number of patients travelling to developing countries to have those services. Of the several countries which promotes medical tourism, India, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore tops the list globally. India has become a top destination for medical tourism in the recent times [2].

India offers a unique and holistic blend of health care services ranges from modern medicine to alternative system of medicine. A report from Ministry of Tourism stated that there has been 140% increase in the medical tourists from 2013 to 2015 and patients across 160 nations visited India for availing quality medical services at low cost. About 2.66 lakh people visited India on Medical visa in 2015 and mainly from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Nigeria [3].

The major drivers for this emerging industry are affordable treatment, high quality health care services, equipped with advanced technology of

international standards, presence of Joint Commission International and International Organization for Standardization accredited hospitals, English speaking medical staffs, competent health care professionals, lack of insurance issues, less waiting time, availability of alternative system of medicine like Ayurvedha, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH) and together with exotic travel destinations. The cost of the medical services in India is one eighth to one fifth of those spent in western countries [4, 5].

India caters not only the neighboring countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives but also caters for Africa, and developed countries like United States, United Kingdom and other European countries. Most sought after medical services in India are orthopedic surgeries like knee and hip replacement, hip resurfacing, cardiothoracic surgeries, transplant surgeries, cosmetic surgeries, bariatric surgeries, surrogacy services and assisted reproductive services. Others includes wellness tourism packages like rejuvenation therapy, spa treatment, yoga and meditation [5].

Boosted by the continuing economic growth contributed significantly by medical tourism and amidst the tough competition facing from neighboring countries like Thailand, and Singapore, India promotes medical tourism by

developing better infrastructure, establishing more medical colleges and producing qualified medical professionals and visa liberalization services like e-medical visa policy, triple entry against single entry, extension for six months depending upon case, medical visa approval in 48 hours for emergency cases, attendant visas for two peoples. Further, Ministry of Tourism has developed Marketing Development Assistance Scheme and providing financial support for the promotion of medical tourism [6].

There is no doubt that India will become a medical tourism hub globally, but with more and more patients coming from affluent nations, it is the need of the hour to improve the public sanitation standards and to provide safety for patients and the family members especially females and children, without disturbing local health care services.

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