

Healthcare Tourism: An Eye Towards The Future

The healthcare tourism industry has been witnessing a remarkable growth in recent years. There are a number of reasons for the continuous growth of this industry especially in the Asian and African countries. One of them being the lure of affordable medical care, along with the scope of enjoying the scenic beauty of tourist destinations. One of the renowned experts, Marvin Cetron, founder and president of Forecasting International, have marked the growing trend of medical tourism and expect it to pose a serious challenge to the Western healthcare industry in the near future. It is necessary to have a glance over the Western medical or healthcare scenario in order to have a clear picture of the kind of competition that can crop up between the former and the Third World medical tourism industry. In some undeveloped regions of the world, the medical facilities are hard to come by, whereas in other countries, the public healthcare system is so overburdened that it would take years to get needed care. For instance, in countries like Britain and Canada, the waiting period for a hip replacement surgery can be more than a year; while in Bangkok or Bangalore, a person can find himself in the operation theatre just after landing the very same day! Not only this, the cost involving the total process is much less than that charged in Western countries. For example, a heart-valve replacement that would cost \$200,000 or more in the U.S. costs a mere \$10,000 in India that includes round-trip airfare and a brief vacation package as well. Doubts are often raised regarding the quality of service offered by medical tourist destinations. But such arguments have no solid ground as the facilities and services offered by them are almost equal or even better than the Western medical services. There are hospitals and clinics that cater to the tourist market that are often among the best in the world. Most of them staff physicians who have received training from famous medical centers in United States or Europe. Bangkok's Bumrundgrad hospital has more than 200 surgeons who are board-certified in the US, and one of Singapore's major hospitals is a branch of the prestigious Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Statistics suggest that the services offered in some of the leading medical tourist destinations often exceed their Western counterparts. As for example, the Escorts Heart Institute and Research Center in Delhi and Faridabad, India, performs nearly 15,000 heart operations every year, and the death rate among patients during surgery is only 0.8 percent—less than half that of most major hospitals in the US. These figures are enough to clarify whatever doubts some skeptics might have on their minds. The future prospect of healthcare tourism in developing nations thus appears to be bright as it is expected to acquire a loyal clientele in the US and other western countries. With more than 43 million US citizens without health insurance and 120 million without dental coverage, seeking medical aid outside their country would high on their priority list. Besides, there is an ever-increasing demand for cosmetic surgery and dental treatments in European countries. These operations are highly expensive out there and as such, more and more people are turning to the East for an affordable alternative. Thailand and Phuket have emerged as the most popular medical tourism destinations over the years.

About the Author

The University of Chicago Hospitals has one of the top cancer programs.

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