

Short Communication

Medical Tourism in Aanchar Lake! Misconceptions and Drawbacks

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Abstract: Medical Tourism is the act of travelling to other countries to obtain world class medical, dental or surgical care. The term was initially coined by travel agencies and the media as a catchall phrase to describe a rapidly growing industry where people travel to other countries for seeking medical care. The two important factors of medical tourism are that the treatment facilities being provided should be of world class and there should be no waiting time. Besides, cost of treatment should be less in comparison to developed countries. Medical tourism has both merits as well as demerits. While aspiring to become a world class supplier of health care services for boosting tourism industry, there should be consideration of issues related to medical treatment of poor people and environment too.

Keywords: Medical tourism, Corporate hospitals, Water body, Environment, Sewage, Water pollution.

INTRODUCTION

Medical Tourism, medical travel or wellness tourism is the act of travelling to other countries to obtain world class medical, dental or surgical care. The term was initially coined by travel agencies and the media as a catchall phrase to describe a rapidly growing industry where people travel to other countries for seeking medical care. The two important factors of medical tourism are that the treatment facilities being provided should be of world class and there should be no waiting time. Besides, cost of treatment should be less in comparison to developed countries. Such services typically include elective procedures as well as complex specialized surgeries such as joint replacement (knee/hip), cardiac surgery, dental surgery, and cosmetic surgeries [1]. Medical Tourism is a relatively new concept especially in developing part of world. This term (medical tourism) was used only recently in medical literature. In Indian media this term was first used in 2002, when the confederation of Indian industry (CII) produced a study on promotion of medical tourism in India, in collaboration with international management consultants, McKinsey & Company [2].

Misconceptions and Drawbacks

There are certain misconceptions, even in medical fraternity, regarding the term medical tourism. The news reported by local Daily Greater Kashmir (GK, Oct. 28, 2013, Vol. 26), titled "Aanchar Lake, Encroachers grab 400 Kanals SKIMS Land. This vast stretch of land behind SKIMS was reserved for starting

Medical Tourism in house boats in Aanchar Lake" [3]. This fact actually prompted us to write on the topic. In this context two things need to be explained (A) The impact of house boats on the environment of water bodies and (B) What actually Medical tourism is?

The house boats have caused an irreparable damage on biodiversity of Dal Lake. Sewage, human wastes and sullage wastes from these house boats is directly discharged into the lake. With the result this world famous water body, situated in Srinagar, Kashmir, is deteriorating day by day. The large pressure of pollution load in Dal lake due to discharge of large quantities of Wastes from human settlements, agricultural runoff and house boats brought the remarkable changes in the quality of Dal lake water which should awake the government, the public as well as the concerned authority i.s. Lakes and Water ways Development Authority (LAWDA) to consider carefully how to prevent the pollution and hence preserve this world famous water body for future generations. Aanchar Lake has already been converted in to a dirty pond due to many reasons, the most important being drainage of effluents from SKIMS hospital and adjoining habitations directly in to this lake. Virtually Aanchar Lake has been converted in to a dust bin. As a result water borne diseases like cholera, typhoid, diarrhea, hepatitis, jaundice, dysentery, etc. are common due to water pollution. A marsh-like look and foul smell is emanating from Aanchar Lake. As a result its water is unfit for industrial or agricultural purposes not to talk of

drinking. River Jhelum has been turned into a drain due to solid wastes and effluents entering through Aanchar Lake and Dal Lake into it as the river is directly connected to these water bodies. Its fish population is decreasing day by day and is the cause of spread of diseases to humans [4]. It is worth mention here that Aanchar Lake is situated in Srinagar (Kashmir) and is connected to world famous Dal Lake through nallah Amir Khan. Srinagar is summer capital of Jammu & Kashmir and SKIMS Hospital is situated on the eastern bank of Aanchar Lake.

Now is medical tourism really something that will be started in house boats in a water body (here Aanchar Lake)? What then actually medical tourism is all about? Medical Tourism, medical travel or wellness tourism is the act of travelling to other countries to obtain world class medical, dental or surgical care [1]. Corporate hospitals in India have immense potential for medical tourism. As many corporate sector hospitals have developed to the extent that they provide world class facilities and expertise at less cost in comparison to western countries (or developed part of the world) and also almost no waiting time. But their number is only a few not more than a hundred. Besides, there is apprehension of illegal organ trade, which is evident from media reports recently, like illegal renal transplant business. It is apprehended that poor people might be exploited for want of handsome amount of money in lieu of organ donation. Another fact is that good doctors are leaving the public sector hospitals and joining the private sector due to attractive salaries. This has further weakened the already ailing public health sector.

The situation of public sector hospitals in the country is very dismal; there are shortages of trained health workers, lack of funds and corruption. No public hospital can claim to have grown to the potential to provide a guarantee of service quality for medical tourists from other states or countries. There is lack of confidence in providers of healthcare and callous approach of healthcare workers towards patients in public sector hospitals. Malpractice is rampant on all sides. Spurious drugs are being prescribed to patients. Post operative care is poor and hospital infection rate is high. Expert doctors are migrating to gulf and other developed countries. With the result majority of poor ailing masses lie unattended for want of decent health care. The number of hospital beds per 1000 population is still less than one. The basic primary health care facilities are lacking like non-availability of labour room at PHCs, a laboratory for simple tests, essential drugs, price control of drugs, guarantee of service quality and accountability, shortage of manpower i.e. medical and paramedical staff to mention a few. Government spends less than 3% of GDP in as important a social sector as health care. This inadequate public spending is not for low income people only, the richer segments too benefit from it. With the result

many patients resort to quacks or seek no medical treatment at all, since private practitioners are beyond the means of most.

There are certain important prerequisites or factors which are important to combine tourism industry with medical treatment. These are:

- There is availability of world class treatment facilities with internationally comparable standards of care like coronary artery bypass surgery, hip/knee replacement, spine surgery, cosmetic and other plastic surgeries, assisted reproduction, eye surgeries, organ transplantation, novel cancer treatment, invitro fertilization(IVF) and modern dental surgeries like dental implants.
- Cost of these procedures should be less than what is in developed countries.
- There should be no waiting time for patients.
- Improved and safe health care in developing countries at affordable cost.
- Scope of travel with medical care.
- Developed tourist industry
- Health insurance policy should be prevalent
- Hospital offering treatment facility to medical tourists should be accredited i.e. certified by a national or international Accreditation agency.
- The hospital acquired infection rate should be low.

Some of the countries which are destinations for medical tourists are Canada, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama, Brazil, Colombia, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Germany, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Turkey.

While aspiring to become a world class supplier of health care services, one can not wish away its huge ailing masses that lie unattended for want of decent health care. However, promotion of medical tourism can have positive spill over effects. These are (a) a part of private healthcare revenue can be utilized for public health spending, (b) benchmarking and streamlining healthcare delivery- this includes the development of treatment protocols, standardization of costing of various procedures, accreditation of hospitals, (c) checking brain drain from the country, (d) increasing employment opportunities and (e) concomitant expansion of aviation sector.

The promotion of medical tourism requires seeking harmonization of health standards (world class treatment facilities with internationally comparable standards of healthcare) particularly post-operative care, to develop uniform regulations of healthcare, reduce prevalence of communicable diseases and hospital infection rate and ensure follow up treatment for medical tourists [5].

So, it is clear from the above discussion that medical tourism has nothing to do with house boats of a water body. It is primarily the availability of a world class medical treatment facilities which would attract people from other regions and countries that would boost tourism industry also. But in Kashmir we do not have any such facility as yet. Hence, at the outset it is humbly requested that these house boats should be removed from the Dal Lake and encroachments from Anchar Lake so that these water bodies can be preserved for future generations. This will also lead to enhanced tourism in Kashmir automatically.

Prevention of water pollution is necessary as it would go a long way in making our city, state, country, world, and planet more clean and healthy. Though many laws like the Water Pollution Act, 1974 and Control of Water Pollution were constituted in India, much more than mere passing of Acts and framing of laws needs to be done. Nature and man must work together. If we won't care about nature, nature too would not bother to nurture us. Our topmost priority should be to combat pollution. We have created these problems, now we have to provide a solution. If we don't save our water resources, then we can soon bid them goodbye. Thus, the most important reason to save this important component is that the future generations should not be deprived of something that rightly belongs to them too [6].

CONCLUSION

Starting medical tourism is a good concept in a third world region like Kashmir as it would boost tourism industry also, but it should not be on the cost of environment and poor people.

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