

Long-Term Care for Elderly: An opportunity for Medical Tourism

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Health care when is unavailable or unaffordable in the home country, a person may consider seeking cheaper and specialized medical services abroad. This trend is known as medical tourism. There is worldwide growth in this type of travel abroad, with agencies and health care facilities specializing in medical tourism.

The cost factor is the main factor, to seek medical care abroad. The difference in exchange rates between developed nations and developing countries is one of the factors.

India is becoming a favourite destination for medical tourism. In our country world class accredited hospitals with advanced technology for medical diagnostics and treatment exist. With the availability of healthcare personnel and cheaper drugs the quality health care services are available at affordable cost and practically zero waiting periods in our country. Cultural warmth and hospitality leading to better understanding between patients and healthcare personnel make India a preferred healthcare destination.

With increasing life expectancy and active ageing elderly lead more productive and active life including networking, travelling and pursuing the second career in the later years. They do not consider age is associated with suffering. Geriatric health care, a means of maintaining healthy lifestyles and the absence of disease, is gaining acceptance and significance. Geriatric medical tourism is a vibrant and growing niche market for warm climate destinations.

With financial constraints and declining health, the elderly are more likely to avail medical services like surgical procedures and specialist health care abroad. Common procedures sought are cosmetic surgery, joint replacement, kidney transplants, cataract lens replacement, cardiovascular surgery and dental procedures. There may also be a desire to try alternative therapies.

For the health of elders functional ability is the central focus. Older patients with physical, mental, or cognitive limitations may have compromised independent living. These individuals with some index of functional incapacity will require long-term care, which encompasses a range of services which deal with the health, personal care, and social needs of individuals who lack some capacity for self-care, delivered for sustained periods. It is an integration of health and hospitality services. Besides acute medical care, there is an opportunity for developing long-term care services for health tourism. These services restore and maintain the general well-being of patients, especially when they take long and may be very expensive in the country of their origin.

Though there are wide ranges of services for Long-term care, however, services of interest for medical tourism are assisted living, hospice/terminal care, caregiver support, and rehabilitation and retirement communities.

Is the health care system in our country suitable for attracting geriatric customers from other countries?

Opportunities for developing medical tourism for long-term care in our country exist. Our country has been bestowed with wonderful geographical locations. There is a possibility of raising a new cadre of human resources as Geriatric caregiver workforce. India provides an advantage of spirituality (yoga, meditation) and anti-ageing intervention with alternative medicine system (AYUSH). India being on the forefront of information technology possibility of using mobile technology improves the quality of care and ease of communication for the visitors.

This opportunity brings several challenges of developing long-term care facilities for the tourist. Besides affordable cost visitors will always weigh the benefits of moving abroad with the familiarity of

their family doctor, present health care facilities and access to their social support. Safety of dependent elderly is of paramount concern since they are vulnerable prey for criminals. The quality of services has to be ensured and accredited internationally. For these services barriers of language and cultural/religious compatibility have to be overcome. Death and related issues of last rites need to be addressed. Long term stay regulations of the country will also decide the duration of stay of these customers.

We foresee this happening in near future with the flow of both domestic and international medical tourist for long term care.