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PAPER NAME: TOURISM HOSPITALITY AND MANAGEMENT

TOPIC: MEDICAL TOURISM

FACULTY: NEHA SINGH

- **Meaning and definition**

Medical tourism is the practice of travelling abroad in order to receive medical treatment. Medical tourism and tourism are fundamentally two different segments but unified under one head. Tourism is associated with freedom and pleasure, hospital evokes image of constraints and sufferings, no one wants to visit hospital for freshness or self-realization. A Traveler Ross (2001) writes, “a dentist chair and the antiseptic smells of a hospital waiting room are synonymous with pain and sense of helplessness. They just don’t blend with travel and vacations”. Apart from this view, people also travel to avail Ayurvedic Therapy, Natural medication in natural wilderness, and yes, it also forms a part of medical tourism, therefore travelling for medical reasons is not always torturing, it is also meant for rejuvenation.

In general, it is the travel of people to another country for the purpose of obtaining medical treatment in that country.

Medical tourism is perceived as the movement of patients to different place to receive treatment for a disease, ailment or condition, and who are seeking lower cost of care, higher quality of care that they could receive at their native country.

- **History of Medical Tourism**

Medical tourism dates back thousands of years to when Greek pilgrims traveled from all over the Mediterranean to the small territory in the Saronic Gulf called Epidauria, and gradually it became a health resort.

In 1326, a little village in east Belgium gained overnight fame after the discovery of the iron rich hot springs

Spa towns and sanitarium were the form of early medical tourism, people travel to these destinations for medical benefits. The wealthy Europeans travelled to spas from Germany to Nile in 18th century.

Some of the earliest forms of tourism directly aimed at increased health and well-being: for example the numerous spas that remain in many parts of Europe for 'taking waters' from that place remained famous till 18th century.

The present phase of modern medical travelling is characterized by an industry approach whereby uninsured and underinsured consumers from developed countries look for first class quality at developing country prices.

Well-developed health care systems and technological advancement have supported the Western countries for several decades and now the medical tourism is supported widely in the Asian countries, especially, South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia.

- **List of Medical Tourism Destinations**

Asia- India, China, Israel, Jordan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Philippines, Taiwan, Turkey, UAE, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan

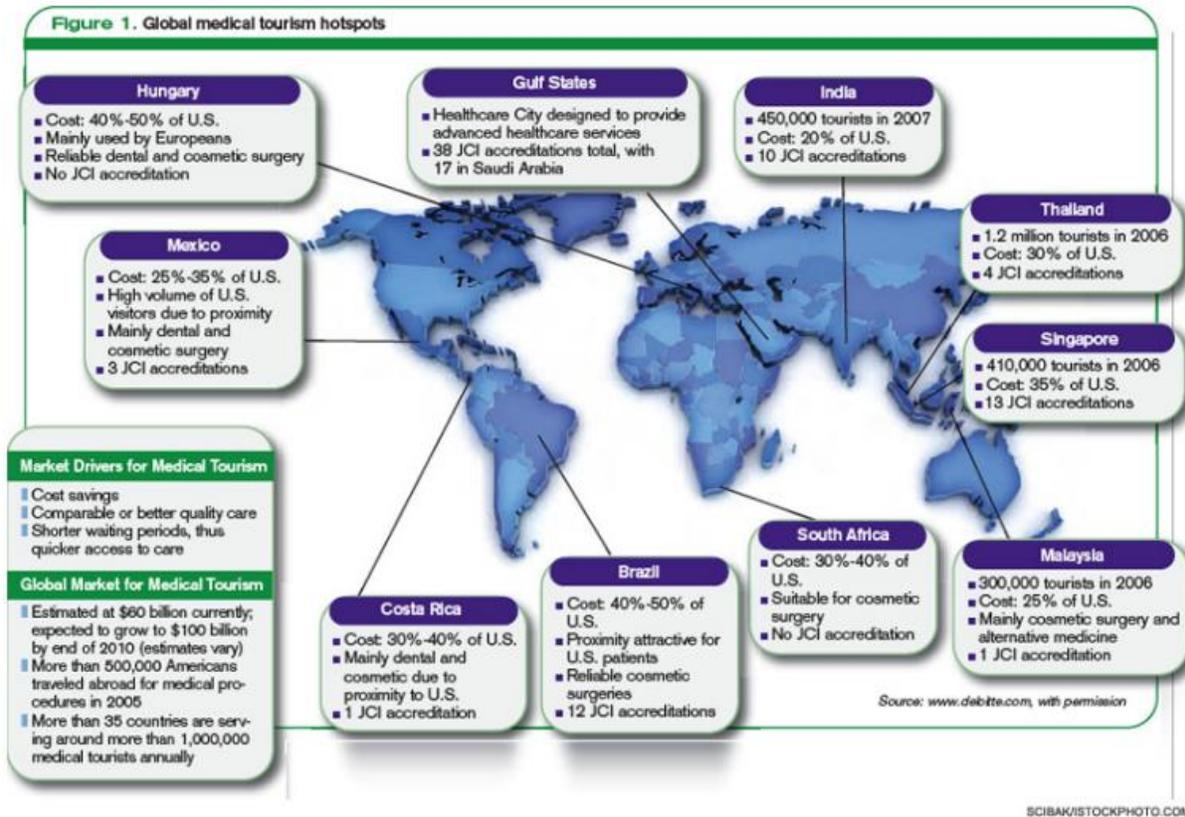
America- United States, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Columbia, Mexico

Europe- Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Portugal, Poland, Italy, Hungary

Africa- South Africa, Kenya, Egypt, Morocco

Others- Australia

Figure 1: Showing Global Medical Tourism Hotspots (adapted from the Hospitalist, October 2010)



Source: Daniel, S.D (2013): Medical Tourism Benefits and Risks, Centria University of Applied Sciences

• Medical tourism in India

India also has historical medical tourism destinations, it has been visited by a constant stream of health travelers seeking to heal themselves through Ayurveda. Ayurveda has always been preserved by the people of India as a traditional “science of life” from thousands of years. Sushruta was the famous surgeon of ancient India.

• Reasons for development of medical tourism

- High savings
- No waiting lists
- High quality treatment

- d. World class facilities
- e. Access to latest technology
- f. Best surgeons
- g. Travel opportunities

- **Strength of medical tourism in India**

- Indian doctors are recognized as amongst the best at international levels; skillful, qualified, readily available and share information with patients.
- High quality treatment in low cost
- Foreigners are also attracted to Indian Systems of Medicine like Ayurveda, Yoga.
- Because of absence of racial discrimination, customers, especially from Africa are comfortable in India.

- **Challenges**

Lack of professionalism- Medical staff in many developing countries lacks in professionalism and behavioural aspects like loyalty, friendliness, concern and warmth.

Legal Problems- there are no uniform laws and moreover in most of the countries there are weak laws for malpractice in medical services which leave patients to fight for themselves, in case if they are cheated.

Lack of Infrastructure- many developing countries face problems due to poor infrastructure, like power supply, proper water, hygiene in hospitals, low quality food and lodging, etc.

Brain Drain- the countries with pool of talented doctors and nurses, it is highly difficult to make them stay at home country because they are offered the best salary abroad.

Follow up problems- if the patient faces any kind of medical issues after returning to his country, it gets difficult and expensive to revisit the place.

Language barriers- the patients usually want highly sophisticated infrastructure and nursing, but the medium of communication creates hindrance for the patients as well as medical team to convey the real problems and solutions to each other.

Conclusion

The medical tourism is an outsourcing medical services primarily expensive surgery to low cost countries. It offers financial value for growing burden of the costs in matured markets like USA. It also provides an alternative for millions of uninsured people to receive affordable and accessible medical services from developing countries.