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MEDICAL MARKETING IN PROMOTING MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India is considered to be among the global leaders in the medical tourism market which has grown rapidly in recent years but facing a high competition from other neighbouring countries like, Thailand & Singapore. This article is intended to highlight the prospects of Medical Tourism in India and tries to illustrate the application of 7Ps of marketing mix in promoting the medical tourism in India. The application of the marketing mix in Medical marketing could bring India to the top rank in the Medical Tourism Market of the world. India currently has around 18% of the global medical tourism market with an average 2,00,000 international patients footfall every year for medical care including surgeries yielding average revenue of USD 15,000/- per medical tourist. Therefore an effective medical marketing strategy can capture the attention of the international patients towards other diversified medical procedures like Ayurveda treatments, Yoga, Fertility, Addiction & Recovery, Dentistry etc. along with its existing reputation in the fields of Orthopaedics and Cardiology. It is due to lack of effective marketing strategy, poor investment in health infrastructure and policy decision on the part of the Govt. creating threats to the Indian Medical Tourism sector in dominating the other market players of the global medical tourism market.

Keywords: Medical Marketing, Medical Tourism, Marketing Mix, International Patients

INTRODUCTION

The urge of travelling is as old as the human civilisation. The tourism industry has a significant contribution in the Indian economy. It has steadily acquired an increasingly significant position in global economy and become world's 7th largest country in terms of its contribution towards

the National Income. According to the report of Economic Times, April, 2017 the tourism sector generated Rs 14.1 trillion (USD 208.9 billion) in 2016 which is equivalent to 9.6% of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Not only that Tourism Industry had created 40.3 million jobs in 2016 which ranks India as 2nd

in world in terms of total employment generation.

MEDICAL TOURISM

Medical Tourism is though a new terminology used in India but the concept is as old as human civilization. During ancient times, people always went to rivers such as the Nile, Ganges, Yangtze and Jordan for holly bath to be cleansed physically and spiritually. The term Medical Tourism can be defined as the process of travelling outside the country or state of one's residence for the purpose of getting medical service which are either not available in home country or too costly to afford. This type of travelling can rejuvenate people's physical, mental and emotional level as it mixes leisure, fun and relaxation along with wellness and medical care. The reason behind adding the term 'Tourism' with 'Medical' is people visits different places for higher and advanced health care facilities. After getting the medical treatment, they can sometimes take advantage of their visits by sightseeing and other traditional tourism activities.

In the past, it was usually referred to those who travelled from less developed countries to the developed nations for availing costly and advance health care facilities in the Super Speciality Hospitals which is not available in

their home country. However, in recent years scenario is just reverse. There are both qualitative and quantitative shifts in patient's mobility as people from developed countries are seen travelling to developing countries in order to access quality health services at affordable and relatively low cost of treatment. According to CII - Grant Thornton White Paper, cost is a major driver for nearly 80% of medical tourists across the globe.

India being rich in offering a variety of holistic alternative healing therapies such as Ayurvedic, Naturopathy, Reiki, Homoeopathy etc. has became the top health care destination for the foreign patients primarily from south east Asian countries. Singapore, Thailand, India, Malaysia, Taiwan, Mexico and Costa Rica are the famous destinations in the world for the medical tourists. Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and the National Capital Region (NCR) are the most favoured medical tourism destinations for the floating medical patients who avail treatments in India.

The following are the special health care services for which the medical travellers shifts from their home country for treatment in a foreign country:

- Cosmetic Surgery

- Dentistry (General, restorative, cosmetic)
- Cardiovascular (Angioplasty, CABG, transplants)
- Orthopaedics (joint and spine; sports medicine)
- Cancer (Often high-acute or last resort)
- Reproductive (fertility, IVF-In Vitro fertilization, women's health)
- Surrogate pregnancy
- Weight loss (LAP-BAND, gastric bypass)
- Scans, tests, health screenings and second opinions etc.

Using the US costs across a variety of specialities and procedures as standard benchmark, a patient's average range of savings in their out of pocket expenditures for the most travelled destinations are:

- India : 65 – 90%
- Malaysia : 65 – 80%
- Thailand : 50 – 75%
- Turkey : 50 – 65%
- Costa Rica : 45 – 65%
- Mexico : 40 – 65%
- Taiwan : 40 – 55%
- South Korea : 30 – 45%
- Singapore : 25 – 40%
- Brazil : 20 – 30%

(Refer Fig. 1)

MEDICAL MARKETING

The process of convincing consumers why they should choose a particular product or services neglecting its competitors is called Marketing.

Medical Marketing is nothing but using the traditional marketing tools and techniques in Medical Industry. The concept of application of traditional marketing strategy in health care sector that was being used for marketing of conventional products like soaps and cold drinks etc. can be termed as Medical Marketing or Hospital Marketing. In this field of Marketing, the patients and their guardians are considered as the target audience and the Medicals/Hospitals & its other associated facilities or services (like Super-specialist doctors, 24X7 hrs. services, advanced medical technology & equipments, available drugs & bloods etc) are being treated as product that is to be marketed among its competitors. Thus Medical Marketing can be defined as the process of convincing the patients or their guardians in choosing a particular Hospital for their treatment neglecting the other competitor hospitals in the market.

An ethical and scientific marketing can grow the profit of the hospitals which indirectly boost the National Income of that country

through health care export. Marketing can not only win the patients across the countries but also grow the revenue through health care exports and enhance the business and reputation of the hospitals as well as the health care service providing country. Medical Marketing can be very effective in attracting the patients both national and foreign patients building hospital brand among the patients and more important is that giving life to a human being by creating awareness among the patients across the globe regarding the availability of a particular treatment of the life threatening diseases in a particular hospital of any country. Andrea Eliscu R.N., President of Medical Marketing Inc., Orlando had stated that “If people don’t know you exist, how can you serve them?”

MEDICAL MARKETING IN PROMOTING MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

Marketing strategy can be very useful in promoting Medical Tourism in India. Government can promote the Tourism Industry through Medical Marketing since India is very rich in its natural beauty, cultural diversity, diversified foods, Ayurvedic Medicine and Yoga. Therefore, marketing with a mixture of affordable quality hospital &

attractive tourism spots can yield good revenue for the country.

Recently, America is becoming too costly country to get medical treatment for the patients of developing & under developed countries and especially for the patients without Health Insurance. This situation is forcing the patients across the world to go for affordable quality treatment outside the countries like America and patients are seen travelling to the countries like Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan & India. The reputed corporate hospitals in India like Apollo, AIIMS etc. can thus take the opportunity through effective medical marketing strategy to promote Medical Tourism and attract the patients towards India for treatment.

MARKETING MIX FOR MEDICAL TOURISM IN INDIA

Like the marketing of conventional products, in Medical Marketing also, the service provider can undertake the 4Ps of marketing i.e. Price, product, Place and Promotion along with three (3) additional Ps i.e. People, Process and Physical evidence to attract the patients across the world. The Marketing Mix for Medical Tourism contains 7Ps of marketing which are as follows:

1) Price:

Price in Health Care Service is the out of pocket expenditures of the patients for diagnosis and treatment of their diseases. Due to increasing cost of private health care services, Price has become the highest concern for the patients, especially, for those who don't have any comprehensive health insurance coverage. The health care provider should have detail knowledge on the out of pocket expenditures on Health among the patients in various countries all over the world. It will help in fixing the best affordable price for the patients to grasp the opportunity of comparative price advantage of the high cost of treatment in other developed countries.

Therefore, the price is one of the important elements of the Marketing Mix in health care marketing or medical marketing. In promoting Medical Tourism in India, Price plays an important role to attract the patients (both national and foreign patients) in choosing the hospitals for treatment of their diseases. The effective pricing strategy will help in taking decision of flying the patients from one country to another. Because, if the cost of health care in home country is too high in comparison to the neighbouring countries, the patients can complete their entire diagnosis cost along with the other tourism activity

(testing the natural beauty, visiting the place of historical importance etc.) within the cost which he or she supposed to spend in their home country for treatment of their diseases.

Kaur et. Al (2007) stated that in India, complicated medical procedures are so cheapest that it is being carried out at only one tenth of the cost incurred by a patient in industrialized countries but in terms of infrastructure facilities such as roads, sanitations, power, accommodation and public utility services it is poor and much more development is to be made by the Govt.

2) Product:

The Products in health care market are the quality service, infrastructures, and available medical devices, diversified super-speciality health care services, medications, testing kits, Orthopaedic supplies as well as on call services etc. Since the provider deals with very crucial things i.e. the life of human being the timely availability of all these facilities together makes the Product/services in health care market. The provider while going for medical marketing should give utmost attention regarding the timely availability of all these products. The Products or services in medical marketing plays a vital role in attracting the patients across the world and

considered as the prime factor in choosing the hospitals for treatment in Medical Tourism. The basic purpose of travelling of patients from their home country to the neighbouring countries is either the absence of advanced medical treatment or quality health care services in home country.

Moreover, to promote medical tourism, the provider must also explore the best tourist spots, monuments and the hidden cultural heritages while marketing a hospital to the patients all over the world so that the prospective patients could enjoy the tourism activity after the medical treatment is over.

3) Place:

Place is another important P among the 4Ps of Marketing Mix. Since, time is very crucial in dealing with the life of human being because one second delay in accessing the medical supervision can lost the life of a person. Therefore, if the health care service is available in a backward location where the communication is very poor and the service is available to the patients for the day hour only, then the patients remain at risk and the provider also don't get the opportunity to serve the patients. The convenient place of the hospital may reduce the accessibility time for the patents which is very crucial on the part of

any foreign patients in choosing a hospital. Hence, in Medical Marketing, the provider should describe the location of the hospital in details since the place is much unknown to the foreign nationals.

4) Promotion:

The promotion of the hospital and its service is the most important aspect of the marketing mix in Medical Marketing. The Promotion plays an important role in capturing the attention of the target audiences. There are various promotional tools a provider can implement in Medical Marketing to promote Medical Tourism.

- a) Print Media
- b) Radio
- c) Television Channels like BBC, CNW, Discovery, National Geography etc.
- d) Internet Marketing: Internet has become the most effective and cheapest way to reach the target customers for dissemination of information on various health care services offered by various hospitals. The provider can offer their services to the prospective patients by developing web pages through highly search engines like Google and Yahoo etc.
- e) News letters

- f) Press releases and Articles in Internal Health Magazines and Journals.
- g) Referral Marketing: Wide publicity with the patients coming from different countries already got quality treatment at best affordable prices and cured during their medical tour. Referral marketing now a day considered best marketing strategy in health care industry which can work like a wild fire.
- h) Social Media: Social Media is considered very popular promotional tools in marketing in developed countries though it is very recent origin. But its wide application in Medical Tourism is not yet so developed due to poor literacy rate of the population in developing countries like India. The provider as well as Government can use the Social Media like facebook, twitter etc. for promoting Medical Tourism in India since it is one of the cheapest promotional tools in modern marketing.

5) People:

People are considered as another important P among other Ps of the Marketing Mix in Medical Marketing. Since quality of health care depends on the education & experience of the health care professionals i.e. doctors,

nurses etc. It is seen that in some hospitals in India, like Apollo hospital at Chennai and CMC hospital at Vellore, the qualifications of the doctors, nurses and other paramedical staffs are more emphasized to attract and capture the attention of the international patients. Again, since different patients of different countries are speaking in variety of languages the provider should also give attention the language and communication aspects while marketing their hospitals otherwise it may create lots of problem in understanding the pain of the patients and further medical procedures. Therefore, the Govt. should also take necessary steps to resolve this issue.

6) Process:

In health care industry, quality is considered as most concerning factor among the patients. International accreditation has become one of the biggest drivers in the growth of medical tourism market. The international patients want to make sure themselves that the hospital is licensed, registered and accredited by a recognized international organization like Joint Commission International (JCI) or ISO etc. before choosing for diagnosis and treatment of their diseases. Therefore, the process of acquiring accreditation is also one

of the important marketing tools for marketing of health care service and the hospitals in order to convince the patients about its standard service quality in a worldwide competitive environment. The health care services pass to the patients through a predefine process of the hospital i.e. Patients registration, counselling the patients on the history of their diseases, diagnosis and treatment etc. The complex hospitalisation process may result in long waiting time for the patients in pain. In such situation, if the patients don't get the required medical treatment in time, that may lead to the death of the patients also. Therefore, the process of hospitalization should be simplified to get timely treatment by the patients.

7) Physical Evidence:

Though the health care service provided by the doctors & advice of the medical experts is intangible in nature it is also accompanied by various other physical products like medicines, surgical instrument etc. The service of a particular hospital is also visualised in terms of good hospital infrastructures, latest advanced technologies, medical equipments, machineries, good ambiance with spacious and luxurious rooms and excellent amenities. Thus all the above

facilities provide competitive advantages over the other competitors in gaining the confidence of the patients while choosing the hospitals.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that medical marketing and medical tourism is the two side of a coin. Medical marketing though a very recent origin in the field of service marketing but it can yield a lion share to the national income of a country through health care export. Marketing can also contribute a lot to the tourism industry in the form of medical tourism in India which will not only create a brand image of the hospitals among the patients across the globe but also a simultaneous development can be took place in terms of employment generation, transportation, human resource development through offering a healthy life and finally helps in increasing the GDP of the country. This article identifies the various elements in marketing mix that can be applied in medical marketing to promote medical tourism in India. Therefore, Government of India should come up with innovative tax incentive schemes to encourage the local entrepreneurs for building hospitals, using latest medical equipments, provide language training & cross cultural training to the

healthcare professional to deals the patients coming from nook and corner of the world. Again Govt. can implement new visa regime to encourage travellers as well as to attract foreign direct investment in health care sector and adopt policies to promote the medical tourism in India.

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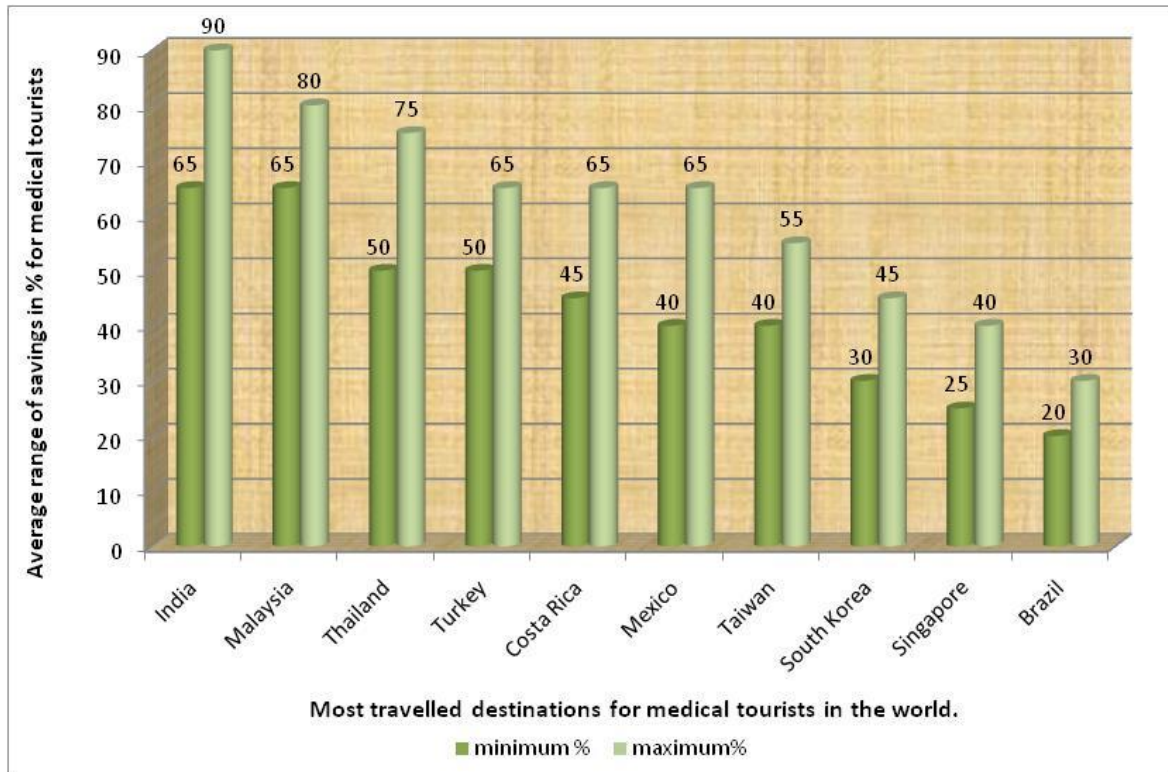


Fig: 1. Average range of savings of the medical tourists in most travelled destinations of the world.