

Health Tourism by Citizens of Bangladesh

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Medical tourism often known as health tourism or health travel (WHO). It may be inbound medical tourism or outbound medical tourism. Outbound medical travel is influenced by a variety of push and pull factors. High healthcare costs at home, being under insured or uninsured, the treatment being unavailable for ethical or regulatory grounds, extensive surgery waiting lists are all push factors. The pull factors are host country atmosphere, the destinations attraction, cost of desired treatment, overseas educated medical personnel, the medical tourism facilities, services equivalent or of superior quality. Indian High Commission processed around 3000 visas per day with particular walk-in services for those seeking medical care on an average.

According to reports of various media and research articles, more than 3,00,000 people of Bangladesh go abroad for medical treatment every year, mainly to India. In 2017, this number was 2,20,000. People of Bangladesh spent a total of BDT 99.33 billion on medical ground in abroad during the 2018-19 fiscal year, compared to BDT 336.80 billion spent by outside tourists.

Why the People Choose to Go Abroad for Medical Treatment?

i) **Advanced Medical Facilities**

Selected countries are India, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia which are popular destinations due to their state-of-the-art healthcare infrastructure. Besides, people also move to USA, UK and other countries of the world according to their access, facilities and other advantages.

ii) **Specialized Care**

For specific conditions such as cancer, heart disease and neurological disorders, specialized care and expert medical professionals are sought in reputed international hospitals.

iii) **Perceived Quality of Care**

There is a perception that medical care abroad is of higher quality, with better patient outcomes and more experienced doctors service.

Quality and Accessibility of Healthcare in Bangladesh

● **Healthcare Infrastructure**

While Bangladesh has made significant improvements in its healthcare system, many facilities still lack the necessary equipment, trained professionals and resources to provide comprehensive care.

● **Public versus Private Healthcare**

The discrepancy between public and private healthcare services is significant. Public hospitals often suffer from overcrowding and resource constraints. On the other hand, private hospitals though better equipped, are often unaffordable for the average citizen.

● **Medical Education and Training**

Although there is an increase in medical colleges and training institutes, the quality of medical education and continuous professional development remains inconsistent.

Challenges faced by patients abroad

● **Financial Burden**

Seeking treatment abroad is often prohibitively expensive. The costs include medical expenses, travel, accommodation and sometimes extended stays.

● **Logistic Issues**

Arranging travel, obtaining medical visas, navigating foreign healthcare systems can be challenging, stressful for the patients and their families.

● **Cultural and Language Barriers**

Patients may face difficulties in communication and adjusting to different cultural practices in healthcare settings.

Socio-Economic Impacts

● **Economic Drain**

The outflow of funds for medical treatment abroad represents a significant economic drain on Bangladesh. This money could otherwise be investigated in improving local healthcare facilities.

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● **Brain Drains**

There is also a trend of skilled medical professionals leaving Bangladesh for better opportunities abroad, exacerbating the shortage of qualified healthcare providers within the country.

● **Healthcare Inequality**

The ability to seek treatment abroad is often limited to the wealthier segments of the society, highlighting and potentially worsening socio-economic inequalities.

Policy and Recommendations

i) Investment in Healthcare

Increased investment in healthcare infrastructure, particularly in advanced medical technologies and specialized care facilities is crucial.

ii) Strengthening Medical Education

Improving the quality of medical education and continuous professional development can help retain skilled healthcare workers and improve the overall standard of care.

iii) Public-Private Partnerships

Encouraging collaboration between the public and private sectors can lead to better resource utilization and improved healthcare services.

iv) Patient Support Systems

Establishing the robust support systems for the patients seeking treatment abroad, including the financial aid, logistic assistance and post treatment care coordination.

Total Bangladesh healthcare spending is over \$ 10 billion and has grown about by around 10% per annum for the last decade.

At present, Bangladesh ranks 88th in the latest ranking released by WHO on the quality of healthcare around the world. Among the SAARC countries, only Srilanka is ranked above BD- 76th position. Others are: India 112th, Pakistan 122nd and Nepal is 150th.

USA is the highest spending country worldwide when it comes to healthcare. In 2021, total health expenditure in the USA exceeded 4 trillion dollars, GDP part is app.20% by the year 2031.

29% of all Bangladeshi tourists travelling abroad spent money on medical treatment in foreign countries. India continues to be the most preferred destination for the Bangladeshis seeking medical treatment. Around 2.5 million medical tourists go to India every year from Bangladesh and they spend about \$ 500 million there, according to the data from India tourism ministry.

Former Health minister Zahid Maleque in a statement mentioned that approximately \$5 billion or TK.60,000

crore is spent annually on overseas medical treatment, which is TK.20,000 crore more than Bangladesh Health Sector budget.

Present Situation of Health Sector

Government of Bangladesh is trying to keep the hard-earned foreign currency in the country, spend this money on various development works of the country. Individuals chose to foreign countries from Bangladesh for cardiovascular, dental, infertility/IVF, cancer treatment. The availability of physicians and better service quality, sufficient medical facilities and services, treatment cost, hygiene, safety, security, attractive tourist places are the most important factors driving the individuals to seek outbound medical services.

According to WHO

Chronic diseases are the main cause of death worldwide. In 2016, Ischemic Heart Diseases (IHD) alone took the lives of 9.43 million people globally. For different types of Cardiovascular Diseases (CVD) -17.9 million deaths occur worldwide each year.

All types of cancer, lung disorders, diabetes are among the primary chronic diseases that cause the most fatalities each year. Ca lungs alone claimed the lives of 1.7 million people in 2018, while liver cancer claimed the lives of nearly 782 thousand people. Infections such as pneumonia, diarrhea and measles were responsible for more than two-thirds of the estimated 3.7 million children's death of South Asia in 2000.

Borg et al. revealed that high treatment cost countries are USA, Japan. Average cost countries are Germany, Singapore. Low-cost countries are India and Poland.

Conclusion

While the trend of seeking medical treatment abroad highlights the existing gaps in Bangladesh health care system, it also underscores the need for systemic improvements. Addressing these challenges through targeted investments, policy reforms and international collaborations can enhance the quality and accessibility of healthcare in Bangladesh, potentially reducing the need for citizens to seek treatment abroad.

Recommendations

1. Improvement of health care delivery system.
2. Modernize the institutional facilities to such a level so that it can compete with the hospitals of Global, International standard.
3. Prepare the expertise at all levels of Health care delivery functions.

4. □ Top class, modern investigation facilities should make available and accessible at least in National and Divisional levels of Bangladesh.
5. □ Attempt should be made to appoint International renowned physicians in specialized Government and Private Hospitals for ensuring treatment facilities of complicated cases locally and exchange of knowledge, training facilities for the doctors of Bangladesh.
6. □ Special offer, facilities can be made for the famous doctors of Bangladesh now providing service in abroad countries to return their motherland to get their service.
7. □ Establishment of World class Hospitals, Institutes with all modern facilities for the staff at international level.
8. □ High level, skilled technician, nurses, staff should be developed for maintenance works of the sophisticated instruments, patient care and other requisite tasks.
9. □ Level of Medical Education should be maintained in such a level so that future doctors and Health Professionals become capable, confident scientific doctors to deal with cancer, paralysis and neurological disorders and all other complicated cases.
10. □ Creation of congenial atmosphere for the health employees, so that all can work safely, securely with patriotism, utmost respect and not become the second victim in this Medical Profession.

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