

## **Medical Tourism of citizens of Bangladesh: Are we able to contain all patients within the country?**

**Dear readers,**

Medical tourism has been a growing trend among Bangladeshis for years, with thousands traveling abroad for treatment. Countries like India, Thailand, and Singapore are the primary destinations for patients seeking advanced medical care. But the question remains: Can Bangladesh contain all its patients within the country?

Bangladesh has made significant strides in healthcare over the past decades. The rise of private hospitals, improved infrastructure, and access to specialized treatments have contributed to the country's medical sector. Hospitals like Evercare, United, and Square now offer world-class facilities in cardiology, oncology, Orthopedics nephrology, and other specialties. The government has also been investing in public hospitals to improve healthcare accessibility for the general population.

However, despite these advancements, many patients still seek treatment abroad. The reasons include the perception of better-quality care, access to specialized treatments not yet available in Bangladesh, and the reputation of foreign hospitals for handling complex medical cases. Another major factor is trust—many Bangladeshis believe that international hospitals provide more accurate diagnoses and better patient management. Additionally, misunderstandings between patients and healthcare providers, such as miscommunication, lack of empathy, or administrative inefficiencies, can make negative experiences unforgiving. When patients feel unheard or mistreated, they may lose faith in the local healthcare system and opt for treatment abroad, believing foreign hospitals to be more reliable.

Another significant issue is the unavailability of certain advanced medical treatments in Bangladesh. Procedures like robotic surgery, advanced cancer treatments, and some specialized transplant procedures are either unavailable or in their nascent stages in the country. For patients who require these treatments and can afford them, seeking healthcare abroad becomes inevitable. Until healthcare institutions, policymakers, and medical professionals work together to develop and implement such cutting-edge medical services, it will be difficult to retain all patients within the country.

Patients also prefer to receive their medical care in hospitals that are internationally accredited and maintain high safety standards. The assurance of quality, strict adherence to medical protocols, and modern technology-driven treatment options make foreign hospitals more attractive to those seeking specialized care. If Bangladesh aims to retain more patients within its healthcare system, ensuring accreditation, patient safety, and consistent quality improvements in local hospitals will be essential.

One major challenge in Bangladesh healthcare system is the severe shortage of medical professionals. The country has approximately one doctor per 1,581 people, falling short of the WHO-recommended 1:1,000 ratio, with around 113,230 doctors. The shortage of medical professionals often leads to longer waiting times, inadequate patient care, and a lack of specialized treatment, which further drives patients to seek healthcare abroad. Additionally, the country faces a severe nursing and medical technologist crisis. According to the WHO, the ideal ratio is three nurses and five medical technologists per doctor. However, in Bangladesh, this ratio is far from the standard. The Bangladesh Nursing and Midwifery Council (BNMC) reported only 73,043 registered nurses, meeting just 24% of the WHO's recommended workforce. Medical technologists are also critically lacking. According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) report, only 5,184 medical technologists and 1,417 lab technologists are currently working. To meet the WHO standard, the country should have 128,075 medical technologists, indicating a substantial shortfall.

This scarcity undermines healthcare quality and forces many patients to seek treatment abroad. To address this, immediate attention from policymakers is a crying need, including increasing the number of training institutions, providing incentives to retain skilled professionals, and ensuring equitable distribution of healthcare workers across the country.

To reduce medical tourism, healthcare stakeholders in Bangladesh—including the government, private institutions, and medical professionals—must focus on further improving healthcare services. Strengthening medical research, introducing cutting-edge treatments, ensuring high standards of patient care, and training specialists can help build trust in local facilities and as importantly, a doctor-patient relationship that will be a bond of trust going beyond prescriptions and procedures. Policymakers should also implement strategies to encourage medical professionals to stay in the country and contribute to its healthcare system.

While Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in healthcare, there is still work to be done to retain patients within the country. By prioritizing quality, affordability, and trust in local healthcare services through collaborative efforts, the country can significantly reduce its reliance on foreign medical tourism and provide comprehensive treatment solutions for all citizens.

Sincerely

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