REVIEW ARTICLE

Health Tourism and Ayurveda: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Health tourism is a broad concept which covers all aspects related to health-oriented tourism in all level of prevention. Health tourism refers to people travelling to a country other than their own to obtain medical treatment. This usually referred to those who travelled from less-developed countries to major medical centered highly developed countries. Because of the globalization of the medical system, the trend is changing nowadays. The world is recognizing the merit of *Ayurveda* which offers prevention as well as cure for several diseases. The advancement in health knowledge make people realize the need of maintaining the physical as well as mental and spiritual health. So people are seeking many alternative methods which are free from side effects as well as chemical free. *Ayurveda* is the best alternative for the same with *panchakarma*, *yoga*, *dhyana* and *pathyaapathya* as its unique concept.

Ayurveda is holistic system of medicine that deals with the body, mind and spirit of a person. Because of these peculiar features in *Ayurveda*, *Ayurveda* has bigger scope to become the best alternative for health tourism.

This article will focus on the scope and significance of *Ayurveda* in health tourism.

Key words: Health Tourism, Ayurveda,

INTRODUCTION

Health tourism refers to travelling to other countries to obtain medical, dental and surgical treatment¹. Or the practice of travelling abroad and order to receive medical treatment is health tourism. Also called as medical tourism, wellness tourism, health care travel and medical care travel².

Health tourism is a wider term for travel that focus on medical treatments and the use of healthcare services. It covers a wide field of health-oriented tourism ranging from preventive and health-conductive treatment to rehabilitation and curative forms

Access the article online

Quick Response Code

www.thehealerjournal.org

DOI: 110.51649/healer.60

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Submitted: 09.06.2021

Received: 12.06.2021

Revised: 16.06.2021

Accepted: 20.06.2021

of travel. Wellness tourism is a related field. The 1st recorded instance of people travelling for medical treatment dates back thousands of years to when Greek pilgrims travelled from the eastern Mediterranean to a small area in the saronic Gulf called Eppidauria³. This territory was the sanctuary of the healing god Asklepios. In Nepal also people from ancient time make Trips to sacred temples bath and hot springs. In the past people used to travel from developing countries to developed countries. As the medical services in the developed countries were advanced with availability of sophisticated diagnostic as well as treatment machineries. Now the scenario has changed. Due to increase in the knowledge with preventive and curative health, people travel for health-related service according to the availability of the services and for many other reasons also.

AYURVEDA AND HEALTH TOURISM:

Ayurveda is a holistic system of medicine, in which the cause of diseases is uprooted rather than curing only the symptoms of the disease. The health is defined as the condition of equilibrium of *Dosha*, *Dhatu*, *Malakriya* and *Prashannaaatma*, *Indriya* and *Manah*⁴. In simple terms health or *swastha* is the condition of the normalcy of *Tridosha* and *Sapta dhatu*⁵. The prime aim of *Ayurveda* is to prevent and promote health of healthy and cure disease of the diseased persons⁶. The world is increasingly recognizing the merit of *Ayurveda* which offers effective cure for several diseases including chronic ones. It helps rejuvenate the body, fight stress and offer relief in life style related diseases. It results in no major side-effects while offering relief and this is one of the main attributes of *Ayurveda*.

Health tourism comprises of two terms healthcare and tourism. A health tourism destination highlights its healthcare resources that give wellness and cure and tourism attractions that give peace of mind and relaxation to the body. Health tourism is becoming a preferred form of vacationing as it covers a broad spectrum of medical services and leisure, fun and relaxation together with wellness and healthcare. Health tourism is a niche tourism developed by the competing tourism promoting countries in order to attract people travelling with the prime purpose of getting healthcare facilities. People travel for health-related issues according to their preferences and many other factors like cost effectiveness, availability of health care facilities, etc.

Ayurveda is an indigenous system of medicine in the Indian subcontinent. *Ayurveda* provides many preventive modalities as well as curative health care. Preventive

modalities like lifestyle modification (those who follow *dinacharya*, *ritucharya* and *nishacharya* will not be afflicted by diseases)⁷, *yogasana*⁸, *pranayama*, *dhyana*, preventive *panchakarma*, *pathya* and *apathya*⁹, etc which not only prevent from the unexpressed disease but also promote the health and make body immune to disease. *Ayurveda* with its versatile effects help in maintaining health and peace. There are several aspects in *Ayurveda* which distinguish it from other approaches to health care:

1. It focuses on establishing and maintaining balance of the dosha and dhatu¹⁰ within us, rather than focusing on individual symptoms.
2. Tailor made approach to the patient¹¹. It recognizes the unique constitutional differences of all individuals and therefore recommends different regimens for different types of people as although two people may appear to have the same outward symptoms, their constitutions differ and therefore call for very different remedies.
3. *Ayurveda* seeks to heal and maintain harmony between the fragmentation and disorder of the mind-body complex and restore wholeness and harmony to all people rather than curing the body only.

SIGNIFICANCE OF HEALTH SERVICES:

Health is wealth an old maxim describes the importance of health. The demand of health services are growing globally which can be attributed to rising income and education, ageing population and increase in chronic disease. Health can be maintained through preventive measures such as healthy lifestyle or through curative measures such as treatment and medicines. The disease can be prevented or cured as early as possible if early diagnosis is done. In this way the patient will not have to go through agony and pain of disease and its discomfort. By the use of Health Tourism people can get high quality treatment at low cost. Similarly, they can get access to the high technology and their indigenous health system which are not available in their native country.

MODES OF SERVICES IN HEALTH TOURISM¹²

There are mainly four modes of services in health tourism

1. **Cross-Border Supply:** The services are offered across national boundaries through information technology and the consumers and the service providers are not required to cross the national

borders.eg telemedicine.

In Ayurveda these services can be provided by disseminating the information about the ayurvedic techniques, services and modalities to other countries.

2. **Consumption Abroad:** The movement of healthcare seekers to the country providing the service can be for various reasons. People may travel to other countries as tourists, students or patients. Various factors leading to travel may be cost effectiveness, better quality, less waiting time, availability of treatment, alternative therapies and natural endowments.

Many people from different countries visit south east Asian countries for the ayurvedic therapies and treatment modalities. They travel especially for the panchakarma and yoga therapy.

3. **Commercial Presence:** The service provider company moves to the country of consumption. The service may be provided through a locally established affiliate or subsidiary of foreign owned and controlled company.

By this mode, we can develop infrastructure in the native country as well as establish institutions providing ayurvedic health care facilities in the destination countries.

4. **Presence Of Natural Person:** The service is provided by a person who moves or travels to other countries. They may be employee of a company, doctors, specialists, nurses, paramedics, midwives, technicians, consultants, trainers, health management personnel, and other skilled and trained professionals

Skilled Ayurvedic physician and therapists can travel to different countries for providing ayurvedic health care facilities. By this the native country can earn good revenue.

FACTORS LEADING TO POPULARITY OF MEDICAL TOURISM

Many factors are responsible for the popularity of health tourism and its globalization. The factors may be:

- High cost of health care: The cost of health care in the destined country may be lesser compared to

his.

- Low wait times: The travel can be planned according to the low wait time for prompt treatment.
- Make use of highly sophisticated equipments and technology provided by the health tourism destination.
- The ease and affordability of international travel
- Improvement in both technology and standards of care in many countries, availability of the services of highly skilled doctors and high standards of care.
- Taking advantage of international travel and favourable exchange rates.
- Circumvention tourism: To access medical services legal in destination country which may not be legal in certain country.
- Avail of the indigenous System of medicine:

Not only is Nepal one of the world's oldest medical tourism destinations, but it is also one of the most popular ones as well ¹³.

BENEFITS OF HEALTH TOURISM

Availability of health care is one of the basic rights of all human beings. With the advent of newer technologies the facilities have become easier and cheaper. People have access to health care facilities because of the development of health tourism. Health tourism is having many benefits:

- Globalization of health facilities: The health facilities will be available to people of different part of the world
- Cost effective: The people can get avail to the same technologies at a cheaper price than their native country.
- Indigenous health system: There are many indigenous health care system in the world. By the development of health tourism, people can get benefit of those health care.
- Quality services at low cost
- Explore newer technology, new culture

Benefits enjoyed by health tourism destinations are:

- Increase in employment opportunities

- Avenue of foreign exchange generator.
- Growth in insurance industry.
- Growth in Gross Domestic Product.
- Reversal and arrest of brain drain,
- Development in infrastructural facilities.
- Increased demand for alternative medicines.
- Health tourism improves political friendship.

RISKS OF HEALTH TOURISTS

Although health tourism has many importance it has its downside as well:

- Endemic disease of destination country: Some diseases are endemic to certain place of the world, so people who travel to those places have higher chances to get those disease.
- Quality of post-operative care: In some destination places, the quality of post-operative care may not be of standard quality.
- Risk of complication (soon after procedure travel: DVT, Pulmonary embolism)
- Circumvention tourism: Some people may travel for the health care system which may be illegal in their native place and legal in the destination place.
- Ethical issues: Illegal purchase of organs and tissues for transplantation. The destined country may focus only on the health tourism rather than the native people for the gain of revenue. So in India it is called as “Policy of medical treatment for the classes and health missions for the masses”
- Legal issues: Medical malpractice, Illegal in-home country

DISCUSSION:

Medical tourism is niche of tourism which is developing at a very fast pace along with the development of civilization and knowledge.

Medical tourism is helping the country in earning foreign exchange and adding to the revenues of the country. It also helps in improving the general and health infrastructure and quality services. Hospitals are giving higher remuneration to doctors and other health care staffs, which is possible due to earnings from medical tourism. This, in a way, is good as

it is preventing brain drain and giving proper opportunity to the available manpower.

A patient is in need of health care whether it is from one country or other. It is not humane to distinguish on nationality basis for providing healthcare. However it would not be fair and just to the people of the country if their needs are neglected. Hospitals will have to conform to the social responsibility factors also. Nepal is becoming a preferred medical tourist destination but there are various concerns for the medical tourists also regarding the standard, infrastructure and ethical as well as legal concerns. There are plenty of challenges that need to be addressed like coordination between hospitals, tour operators and respective state government, accreditation, transparency in pricing and easy visa rules.

Many people visit Nepal per year to get access with *panchakarma* therapy, *yoga* techniques and other diet and lifestyle modification described in *Ayurveda*. And it is needless to say that *ayurveda* plays significant role in the growth and development of Health tourism in Nepal.

CONCLUSION:

Health tourism is not a novel concept, it is thousand years old. It was practiced in Nepal since time immemorable. In the current scenario, health tourism is gaining popularity as more people prefer high quality at low cost. With the advancement of the civilization, the concept of health and disease has been changing from time to time. In the past, the importance was given to treatment of diseases. Now more and more importance has been given to preventive aspect of health so that a person neednot go to the diseased state. Health tourism has its own merits and demerits.

In *ayurveda*, the prevention and promotion of health as well as treatment of disease are given equal importance. Many modalities are described in *Ayurveda* which has been proved to be a boon in medical sector. As *Ayurveda* is indigenous to Indian subcontinent, *Ayurveda* can be well established as the destination of health tourism in these places. So, along with the curative therapy in *Ayurveda* the preventive therapy and procedure should be well planned and practiced in order to promote health tourism and explore various scope of *Ayurveda* in Health Tourism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Not Applicable

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: None**REFERENCES:**

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How to cite this article:

Khayamali R, Khayamali R, Health Tourism and Ayurveda: A Review, The Healer Journal, 2021;2(2):49-53.