The Changing Face of Medical Tourism

By Healthbase Team

From plastic surgery to heart surgery, self-paying patients to insurance pilot programs, and a sceptical perception to a wide acceptance, medical tourism has seen it all since its early days just a few years ago to its placement today in the health care industry.

Once upon a time...
...flying overseas for medical treatment was a privilege of the elite. Today, it is a necessity for the not-so-elite.

Celebrities hopping on planes to secret locales and returning cosmeticized was what medical tourism was all about just until less than a decade ago when Average Joe came onto the scene with an arthritic hip, a bulging aneurysm and a fractured spine. And thence medical tourism became mostly about the Average Joes.

People who cannot afford expensive medical care at home because they carry insufficient health coverage or people who have to wait in excruciating pain for their turn for government-sponsored surgery are largely the faces of today’s medical tourists. They come from all over the globe and they go to destinations all over the globe as long as they can find the treatment they are looking for, do not have to skimp on quality, save a substantial sum and come home in the pink of health.

And, their expectations are almost always met...
Today there are about 300 Joint Commission International (JCI)-accredited hospitals worldwide – a big leap from the 20 or so JCI-accredited facilities that existed just 5 years ago. That’s a milestone that speaks volumes about the wide popularity and trust that medical tourism has come to enjoy over the years.

So be it for a joint resurfacing, a spine fusion, a heart valve replacement, a weight loss surgery or a cancer treatment, chances are you will be able to locate an accredited hospital in the host country of your choice.

With the accreditation seal comes the assurance that the quality of healthcare offered will be unrivalled, provided by some of the top doctors and surgeons in the world, in a first class facility using state-of-the-art technologies and equipments.

Guess who else has been attracted by the developments in medical tourism?
Answer: Big and small insurance companies and employers.

“America’s largest health benefits company offers global healthcare coverage to its members.”
That was the spotlight of the medical tourism industry in 2009 when Healthbase collaborated with America’s largest health benefits company. Medical tourism with the huge benefits that it affords has since been on the radar of several other insurance companies and employers. And with that, corporate medical tourism has taken off with its new health benefits products to attract uninsured and underinsured segments of the populace.

This also expresses the general sentiment of the public for a need for cost-effective healthcare. And, such a demand is being supplied by not only international players but also by domestic providers to some degree, especially in the case of the US marketplace, where the trend is called domestic medical tourism.
Rather than lose patients to overseas competitors, some recession-struck American healthcare providers have chosen to let patients take up some of their empty beds at a much discounted rate. The terms might appear harsh, such as cash payment on the spot for services rendered, but that’s resulting in a win-win situation for both parties.

**However, all good things come with a price and medical tourism is no exception...**

Medical tourism has its share of challenges which stem broadly from the legal, cultural and travel issues associated with it.

The legal issues could arise either from the level legal recourse that you have in an event of unsatisfactory treatment outcome or from the host country’s domestic court system. For protection from adverse scenarios, you can purchase medical complications insurance designed especially for medical travellers.

Cultural dissimilarity is another inevitable part of medical travel. But, for the benefit of the foreign consumer, international providers catering to medical tourists will almost always have specialized staff to handle international patients. In certain countries like Singapore, New Zealand and India where English is commonly spoken, communication barriers are further lifted. In some other countries and for non-English speaking patients, language translators are easily available.

The actual traveling can be an inconvenience for some, but, it’s heartening to know that with so many new providers emerging you are sure to find high quality affordable health care at a geographically closer destination that you are comfortable traveling to.

Thankfully, these challenges are further alleviated to a large extent when you work with a reputable medical tourism facilitator like Healthbase for a fruitful and convenient medical travel journey.

To sum it up, medical tourism has journeyed far and wide in the last couple of years since its inception. It is clearly one of the fastest growing industries in the world today with a broad acceptance and reach. It is so worthwhile that big name health insurers and employers are also looking for ways to reap its benefits. Medical tourism might be challenging but there are ways to get around those challenges for a successful medical trip. Medical travel experts at Healthbase advise consumers to use the same wisdom when shopping for healthcare as they would when shopping for any other retail product.

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**About Healthbase**

Healthbase, an award-winning US-based medical tourism facilitator, is a one-stop source for global medical choices, connecting patients to leading internationally-accredited healthcare providers in 18 countries around the world. Healthbase coordinates over 200 procedures like hip replacement, hip resurfacing, knee replacement, spine surgery, heart bypass surgery, bariatric procedures, urology procedures, dental treatments, laparoscopic procedures, cancer treatment, cosmetic surgery, etc. for a fraction of the typical cost of care in the US with equal or superior outcomes. To learn more, call 1-888-691-4584 / 1-617-418-3436, email info hb@healthbase.com or visit www.Healthbase.com.