

Bangalore's Medical Tourism Sector

What is medical tourism?

Medical tourism occurs when patients travel internationally with the intention of obtaining privately funded medical care. Our research team, based at Simon Fraser University (in British Columbia, Canada), studies medical tourism from a number of perspectives.

What trends are occurring in Bangalore's medical tourism industry?

Recognized as an international IT hub and known as the Silicon City of India, Bangalore – officially named Bengaluru – is the state capital of Karnataka, one of four southern states of India. Medical tourism in Bangalore is a growing industry, strengthened by a pleasant climate, proximity to known tourism destinations, and a new international airport. Medical tourism is largely promoted by the Ministry of Tourism, both at the state and federal levels. Advocacy initiatives brought forward by the Ministry include hospital accreditation schemes, revising and extending medical visas, and featuring medical tourism in the international 'Incredible India' campaign.

What our research is showing about the current state of medical tourism in Bangalore, India:

- Despite Bangalore having the largest number of medical colleges in the country, a critical shortage of healthcare workers exists, particularly in the public sector and in rural areas. This is exacerbated by the government's *laissez-faire* approach to emigration, producing substantial losses in financial investment and human capital, as higher education in India is mostly government subsidized. India has one of the world's largest international diaspora, while Indian doctors represent the largest number of foreign trained physicians in the US and UK. Some argue that a growing medical tourism industry could help retain health workers in Bangalore.
- Because human health resources are highly concentrated in the city's private sector, both the federal and state government have devised schemes to 'harness' the existing potentials of the private sector to serve the overwhelming majority of the population without health insurance. This includes the provision of land and facilities at concession rates in exchange for free outpatient services as well as duty and tax exemptions for medical equipment. However, these schemes largely benefit private health care facilities while incurring substantial losses to public revenues. Many question the appropriateness of dedicating resources towards tertiary care facilities while there is a near absence of primary care units, especially in urban areas like Bangalore.
- Regardless of the growing medical tourism industry in Bangalore, a paradox of care remains: Bangalore continues to cater to and dedicate resources towards medical tourism, while simultaneously failing to meet the local health service needs. As such, it is imperative that medical tourists do not benefit at a cost to local patients, and medical tourism should only be viewed as an additional revenue source.

For more information: www.sfu.ca/medicaltourism/

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