

# Challenges Faced By Medical Tourists In India And Its Growth Prospects (A Descriptive Study).

Dr. Aditi Sharma, Dr. Nirajan Prasai, Dr. Puneeta Ajmera, Sheetal Yadav, Dr. Samragi Madan

**Abstract:** This study talks about Medical Tourism which refers to any travel to foreign countries for receiving medical treatment. Medical Tourism has become one of the large-scale businesses for many countries such as India, Thailand and many South American countries. Also, countries like Malaysia and Singapore attract a lot of medical tourist. The medical tourism industry is growing gradually. Medical tourism helps in providing fast and easier access to all the services that are required. Medical Tourism is of great importance in context to different prospective such as according to the patient, according to the economic status of the hospital as well as of the country. The main objective of this study is to find out and understand various challenges that are being faced by the medical tourism in India. All the international patients of all age groups were included in the study. A sample of 50 international patients was selected for the study. Results were made based upon the questionnaire and it was observed that the Majority of the medical tourists visited India only for the treatment. Low cost was not the primary reason for their visit to India, instead the better quality of the treatment, services, doctors and staff brought them to India. Medical Tourists seemed to be highly satisfied with the Doctors and fairly satisfied with the nurses and the services. The proper conclusion was made by SWOT analysis after this. Then some of the recommendations were given with respect to the result at micro and macro levels. Also, the future prospects and limitations of the study were also mentioned.

**Keywords:** Accreditation, Medical tourism, Medical Tourism Index, Medical Travel Value, Medical Tourism Industry.

## 1. INTRODUCTION-

Medical Tourism in general has no agreed definition to it. It refers to any travel to foreign countries for receiving medical treatment. Medical Tourism patient includes all the international patients except for the expatriates looking for care in the country of their residence currently and all the cases of emergency. Medical Tourism has become one of the large-scale businesses for many countries such as India, Thailand and many South American countries. Also, countries like Malaysia and Singapore attract a lot of medical tourist. The medical tourism industry is growing gradually. Various targeted segments are being selected by various service providers as a part of their strategy to position their product. Each of which such segments are labelled as the medical tourists. During the previous era of medical tourism, only the wealthy or rich people from the developing and under-developed countries used to travel to the developed countries for the medical treatment purpose as it was unavailable in their own residential country. In order to get treatment rich people from India used to travel to countries like US and UK. But, lately reversal in the trend had been witnessed. Many people from the developed countries also travel to the developing countries that have the potential to offer the similar and comparable quality of medical care.

- Dr. Aditi Sharma is currently pursuing Masters of Hospital Administration in Amity University, Haryana, India. Email: [Sharma.aditi0611@gmail.com](mailto:Sharma.aditi0611@gmail.com)
- Dr. Nirajan Prasai is currently pursuing Masters of Hospital Administration in Amity University, Haryana, India. Email: [nirajanprasai1234@gmail.com](mailto:nirajanprasai1234@gmail.com)
- Dr. Puneeta Ajmera, HOD of Department of Hospital Administration at Amity University, Haryana, India. Email: [pajmera@ggn.amity.edu](mailto:pajmera@ggn.amity.edu)
- Sheetal Yadav, Assistant Professor at Amity University, Haryana, India. Email: [syadav1@ggn.amity.edu](mailto:syadav1@ggn.amity.edu)
- Dr. Samragi Madan, Assistant Professor at Amity University, Haryana, India. Email: [smadan@ggn.amity.edu](mailto:smadan@ggn.amity.edu)

Therapies such as Yoga and Tai Chi and the alternative therapies are witnessed to be growing and they may spread into the spirituality realms. There is an opportunity for the medical treatment with leisure and vacationing to be combined. Medical tourism helps in providing fast and easier access to all the services that are required. People that lives a country which delivers the public healthcare discover that with the help of medical tourism they can get themselves off from the waiting list, as they don't have to compromise their health by waiting. In other words, "when time isn't the option, medical tourism is." There is a great demand of professionals who are trained in medical tourism since it is growing rapidly, and these professionals must have a thorough understanding of medical tourism as a business. All the hospitals associated with medical tourism have a separate team that works with the international organizations and medical tourism companies and firms for attracting more international patients.

### A. Reasons for rise in Medical tourism

Some of the major reasons for accessing the medical tourism are:

- Some specific therapies and procedures may not be present in their home country. Therefore, the patients do not have a choice other than going for treatment to some other country where such therapy or procedure is available
- Patient might want to take medical help or treatment from a well-known and talented medical personal who is working in another country.
- Expats might want to opt a procedure from their home country as they will feel more comfortable in the environment where are being surrounded by their own native culture.
- Some individuals travel for medical tourism when they know that in some other country there is an availability of better technology,
- Some of them also opt medical tourism in order to travel for treatments when they know that there is access to better technology somewhere else, or when they know that they can receive an essential treatment sooner than they would get at home.

- Patients experience less waiting time or no waiting time by opting medical tourism.
- Some might travel because they are being referred by their physicians.
- While some might travel as they have heard about the hospital, it's services or doctor from someone close or a relative.

## B. Global Scenario

Patients from all around the world cross international borders for medical treatment. Some travel because of low cost of the procedure or therapy in another country while some travel for the quality of treatment, doctors, nurses, hospital services etc. Reason could be any, but the medical tourism and its concept is emerging as a new business trend for the developed and developing countries.

As per the global HbA1c Testing Market report of Value Market Research, the market will rise up to USD 3.3 BN by the year 2024, with the Compound Annual Growth Rate of 10.5% which will grow from USD 1.75 BN in 2017. (Walia 2019)

Many governments all around the world have taken different initiatives in order to stimulate and improve the quality of patient care and boost up the Medical Tourism market. Many of the countries have recorded a significant development economically that has the potential in the field of medical tourism. Some of the most preferred procedures include are - cardiovascular surgery, genetic disorder treatments, fertility treatments, elective surgery, dental care and cosmetic surgery.

## C. Indian Scenario

A growing number of medical tourists are seen to be flying to India for quality medical treatment under skilled professionals. India is becoming a hub for medical tourism as the years are passing by. Cost effectiveness being one of the prime reasons for medical tourism in India as compared to other countries. India is gaining a good amount of revenue turnover from medical tourism from last 5 to 6 years.

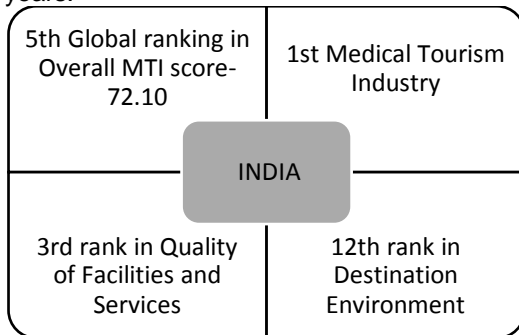


Figure 1

## Medical Tourism Association (Annual Report 2015-16)

Medical Value Travel is recognized as one of the major sources of foreign exchange earnings by NITI Aayog (National Institute of Transforming India). According to FICCI and IMS Health report, India owns about 18% of the total global medical tourism. By 2020, it is estimated that in India the Medical tourism industry would worth \$9 billion and will account for about 20% of the global market share. Around 4.95 lakhs of the patients visited India in the year

2017 whereas this number was 2.34 lakh and 4.27 lakhs in the year of 2015 and 2016 respectively. This shows that the number of medical tourist arrival to India is growing positively with each year. A large number of medical tourists in India are from countries like Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Medical tourists from Iraq, Uzbekistan, Maldives, Oman Yemen and Sudan also visit India. (Majumdar and Kishore 2018) India is among one of the rapidly rising medical tourism destinations all over the world as it has the right potential and can drive higher with the time.

## Major factors that make India an emerging medical tourism destination is -

- Less cost compared to other countries.
- Easy availability of visa for medical purpose.
- Very less or almost no waiting time for procedures and therapies.
- Availability of advanced technology for the treatment.
- Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy are some of the therapies available for the patients for post retreatment recovery.
- An opportunity is given to the patients and their attendants as a medical tourist trip in which they get a chance to visit some of the attractive and overwhelming places of India.

A good populace of English-speaking doctors and staff is one of another aspect that attracts more medical tourist to India. Also, India is having a very strong base of professionally qualified and skilled doctors and staff.

## D. Policies made by the Government for the enhancement of Medical Tourism in India (Chandra 2019)

Ministry of Tourism took various steps such as are-

- A Non-Government organization which is affiliated to the Confederation of the India Industry known as the India Healthcare Federation has prepared a guide for the selection of Indian hospitals to pursue medical tourism on the advice of the GOI. This guide has been published by the Ministry of Tourism on their website.
- Brochures, CDs etc. in order to promote the Medical Health Tourism which have been circulated widely in the targeted market.
- 'Medical Visa' a new type of visa is being introduced by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Government of India for the helping the foreign patients who wish to come India for the purpose of the treatment.
- The Ministry of Tourism has administered a new scheme called Market Development Assistance (MDA) scheme in this sector in which the financial support is provided to the approved hospitals associated with medical tourism or its service providers.
- The guidelines required for the accreditation of the Ayurvedic and the Panchakarma centers are being distributed for the implementation of these guidelines to all of the State Governments of India.
- Wellness, Yoga and Ayurveda have been endorsed with the help of mediums like print, electronics, outdoor and internet mediums under the "Incredible India Campaign" of the Ministry of Tourism.
- The Indian Healthcare Federation is a self-regulating non-constitutional body besides the Family Welfare and Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Tourism, comprise of some private hospitals, some diagnostic centers, some

of the manufacturers of medical equipment and pharmaceutical industries. The aim of this federation is to promote and encourage of the healthcare industry in our country. It functions as a bridge between the Government, the Healthcare provider, the medical equipment manufacturers and other medical institutions.

## 2. OBJECTIVES-

The main objective of this study is to find out and understand various challenges that are being faced by the medical tourists in India.

## 3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY-

Medical Tourism is of great importance in context to different prospective such as according to the patient, according to the economic status of the hospital as well as of the country. Medical Tourism for the patients is of importance as it might help some of them save some coins. Some might come go abroad for treatment because of the lack of services and facilities in own home country. Some might fly across the international borders in order to get quality treatment. While some may cross the borders because of either no waiting time or lesser waiting time for the treatment to start as compared to their own home country. Various reasons could be responsible for the patients to opt Medical Tourism for their own benefit. Similarly, for the hospital the medical tourism can provide a good reputation to the hospital in the eyes of locals as the services provided to the patients would be qualitative and there must be some advanced technology that's why the international patients are also coming to that hospital for treatment. Also, more the number of international patients more will be the revenue generated by the hospital. Medical tourism results in monetary gains and helps in strengthening the creditability and logistics of our country, by the contributing to the market size and generating the employment. Healthcare experts have indicated that India has the potential to target the GDP share of around 2% through Medical Tourism.

## 4. LITERATURE REVIEW-

In a study by Dr. Anupama Sharma in 2013 stated that India is evolving as one of the prime destinations for healthcare facilities and services which is helping the country in the contribution towards the socio-economic development of the society or the community by increasing the employment opportunities and foreign exchange earnings. This is also contributing in the upliftment of the standard of living of the host country by the development of education system and the infrastructure. Hospitals in India today have advanced technology and are well equipped. They also have very qualified and experienced doctors, staff that provide timely and quality treatment to the patients. This study says about the potentials that the medical tourism industry has in India. This study helps in analyzing the latest trends that could help in increasing the medical tourism flow and the role of government in the promotion of medical tourism infrastructure in India. The data was collected through the books, magazines, journals and websites etc. It was then concluded that in the sector of medical tourism industry, India is positioned at advantage to tap various global opportunities. Government also plays a

significant role in the development of medical tourism. The government of India must take steps and start to play the role of facilitator for private venture in healthcare system. Actions should be taken in order to provide quick visa grants to the international tourists for medical reasons through which patients could be able to contact the immigration department at any point of entry for quick clearance. (Sharma 2013) In a study by Poonam Gupta et al, they mentioned the definition of medical tourism by Government of India on the website of Ministry of Tourism as a practice in which people travel across the international or foreign borders in order to obtain the expected healthcare services which includes various procedures and services and this practice is rapidly growing in India. India is among the top three countries as primary destinations for medical tourism in Asia. Delhi is among the five most popular destinations of India for medical tourism. This study aims on the strengths and challenges of medical tourism in Delhi and NCR region. The data had collected the information by the means of a structured questionnaire from 100 inbound patients from 22 nations visiting 16 big hospitals in Delhi for the treatment. Economy in costs, big brand hospitals, qualified doctors, availability of all kinds of medical treatments, high tech procedures, online consultancy, less waiting time for treatment, good infrastructure and hygiene and cleanliness were the key competitive strengths reported. However, patients had faced challenges in finding good interpreters /translators, obtaining visa, getting insurance covers, problems were also faced by them in respect of follow ups and monitoring care, behavior of tour operators, corruption, differential pricing policies and inadequate lodging arrangements. (Gupta, Pandey et al. 2015) In the study by Sevama Sultana et al in 2014, they stated that medical tourism was not a new concept. Medical treatment had become essential for the mankind and requires high quality and a very intensive care. Few countries are playing key roles as primary medical destinations. India comes under one of those countries that have become primary destinations for medical tourism. The objective of this paper was to find out the factors that influence the attractiveness of India as a medical tourism destination. The study had searched for some of the major contributing factors of medical tourism and their relative importance in the attracting the medical tourists. The survey was conducted with the application of structural equation modelling approach. With context to India, tourists considered quality services and low cost for the selection of medical destination. In addition, they also gave value to the destination competitiveness, but the medical tourist attitude was found to be less important in comparison with other factors that affected their destination choice. In this era of globalization, to transform a country like India as an attractive and competitive medical tourist destination different steps must be taken to control cost ensuring the quality of services. (Sultana, Haque et al. 2014)

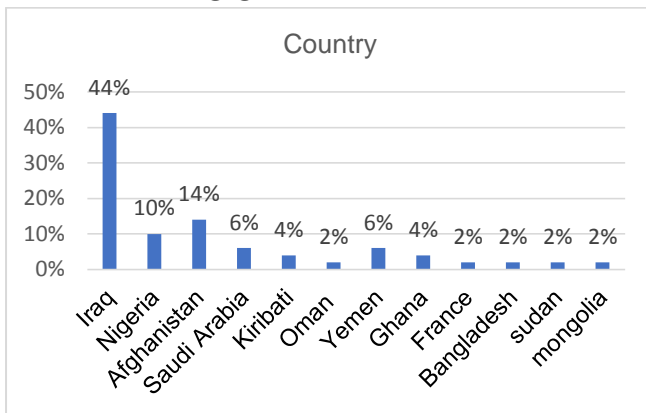
## 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY-

### 5.1 Inclusive and exclusive criteria-

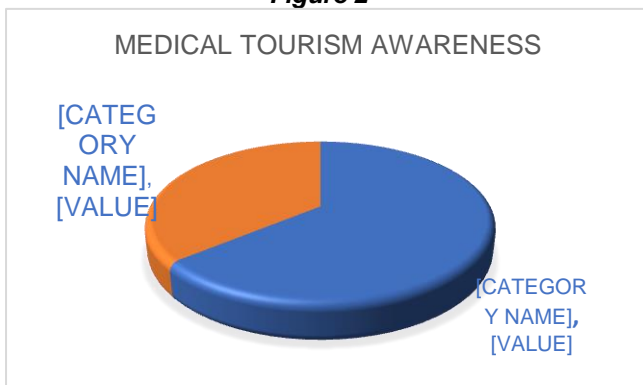
All the international patients of all age groups were included in the study. Only the questionnaires that were fully filled were included in the study.

- 5.2 Sampling technique and sample size-  
The non-probability convenient sampling technique was used in the study. A sample of 50 international patients was selected for the study.
- 5.3 Data collection tool-  
A structured and standardized questionnaire was used in the study.
- 5.4 Procedure-  
A preliminary questionnaire was prepared and then subjected to the validity and reliability test which was then checked by a panel of experts. Final questionnaire thus prepared was distributed among the international patients in the hospital. The data was then collected and organized in MS Excel sheet. Further the analysis was done, and the results were made.

**5. DATA ANALYSIS-**



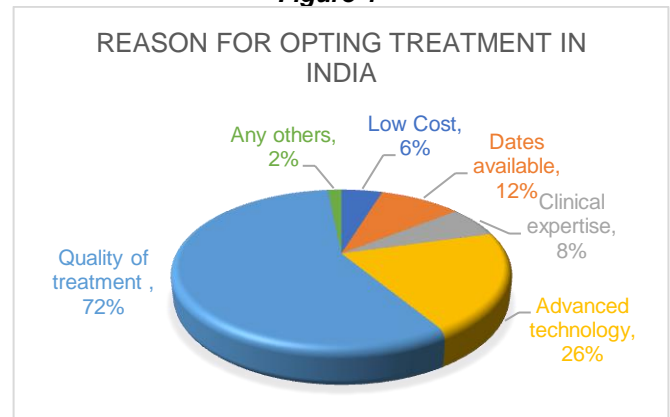
**Figure 2**



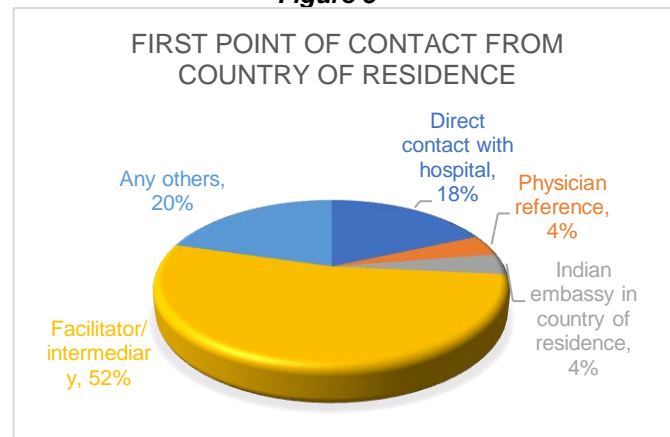
**Figure 3**



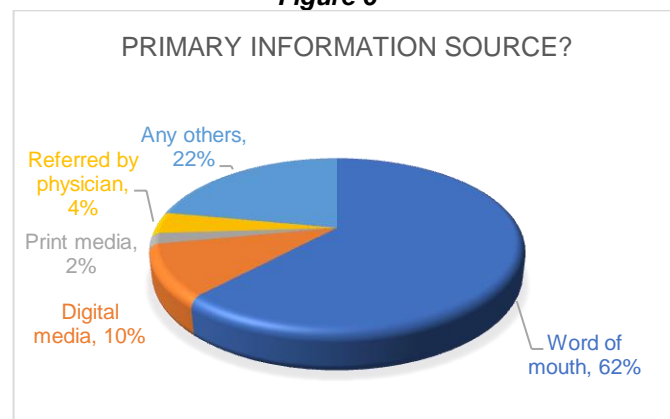
**Figure 4**



**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**



**Figure 7**

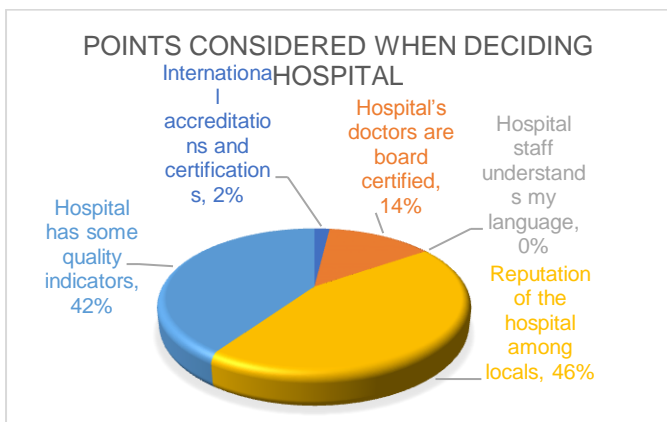


Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

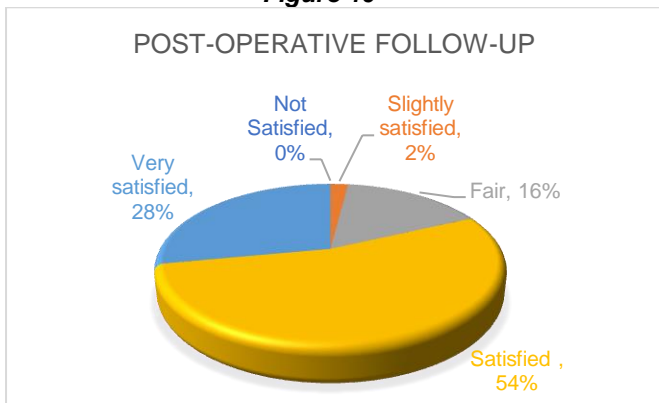


Figure 11

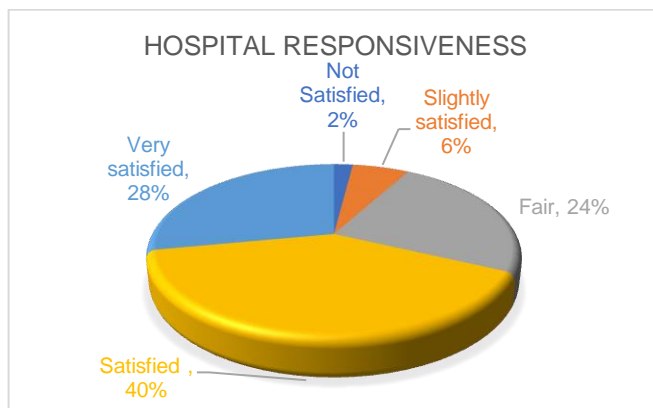


Figure 12

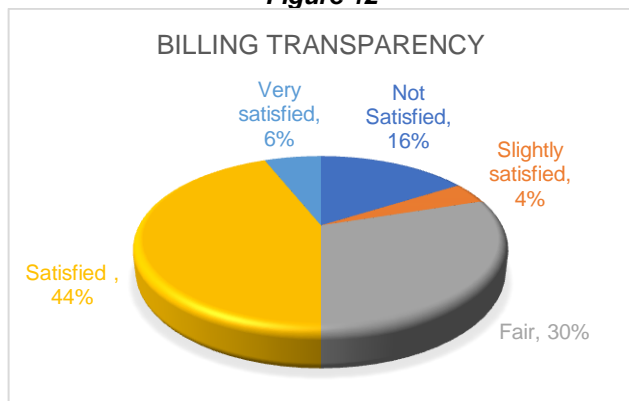


Figure 13

**6. RESULTS-**

The result came out to be that in Figure 2, Iraq was the most common country from where about 44% of the medical tourists visited India for the treatment purpose. Around 64% of the patients were aware about the concept of medical tourism (Figure 3). According to Figure 4, 98% of the international patients visited India basically for the purpose of treatment only. The foremost reason for opting treatment in India came out to be the quality of the treatment (72%) in Figure 5. Also, about 72% of the patients said that they have visited India for the first time. Around 52% of the medical tourists first contacted India from their country of residence through a facilitator or an interpreter (Figure 6). In Figure 7, 62% of the patient reported that the primary source of information about the Hospital was through the word of mouth. 46% of the medical tourists considered this hospital because of the reputation of the hospital among the locals and 42% came to the hospital because of the quality indicators that the hospital has (Figure 8). About 52% patients said that the waiting period for first consultation was less than 7 days and figure 9 shows that 88% patients said that the waiting period between first consultation and the day of surgery was also less than 7 days. 46% of the patients reported that the application of visa and its processing was easy. 38% of the patients felt that the visa fee they had paid was fair. Only 34% of the patients stated that there was ease of communication and understanding of the language (Figure 10). Around 40% of the attendants stayed at the hospital with the patients instead of taking the accommodation in some hotels. 54% of the patients were satisfied with the post-operative follow-ups. 40% patients were satisfied with

<p>Strengths-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinical expertise</li> <li>• Quality of the treatment</li> <li>• Advanced Technology</li> <li>• Less waiting time/ Availability of dates</li> </ul>	<p>Weakness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Airport Connectivity/ Flight options with international cities.</li> </ul>
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospital Facilitation with hotels</li> <li>• Cost rationalization</li> </ul>	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doctors attrition</li> <li>• Obsolescence of technology</li> </ul>

satisfied with the infrastructure of the hospital; the quality of the services provided by the hospital and recommended no changes in the hospital and their facilities. A few of the patients had problem with the hospital providing the accommodation to the attendants of the patients, while others had a problem with respect to the type of the food that was being served in the hospital. Some of them had communication issues as the interpreters were not always available with them. Only a few of them had problems with the cost and billing of the hospital.

## 8. Conclusion

SWOT analysis-

**Figure 14**

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

After extensive literature review and receiving direct patient feedback through the internal survey, it was observed that there is still a scope for further improvement as far as medical tourism is concerned in India. There are some recommendations at both macro and hospital level.

At macro level (country level) government could consider following points while formulating policies-

- There can be a dedicated page on medical tourism at the official website of the Ministry of Tourism that is the Do's and Don'ts and the promotion of medical visa.
- Simpler policies can be made for the extension process of medical visa.
- Rationalize the tax structure for foreign patients who have medical visa. Example- For accommodation and Air travel discounts.
- Foreign language could be made an optional subject for the students of all medical colleges including nurses and technicians.

At hospital level, hospital administrator could consider following points for improving patient satisfaction-

- Improvement of nursing services must be considered up to the patient satisfaction level because a patient spends maximum amount of his/her time with the nurses in the hospital.
- The type of food given to the patient must be considered as per their preference as some patients come from a strong culture background, they have typical food habits and specific taste of food.
- To make life easier for the attendants, promotion and building awareness among them must be done. Though the hospitals provide the facilities of accommodation (through tie-ups with hotels) to the patient's attendants, still there are patients who are not aware of this information.
- During the survey, it came to light that patient appreciate more visits of Doctors after the procedure or the surgery is being done.
- There can be a good use of technology by the Doctors of the hospitals for the follow-up procedure. The follow-up of the patient can be done through e-mails, voice calls and video calls.

## 10. Limitations of the Study

Some of the limitations of the study are-

- Sample size of the study was limited to 50 only.
- Only one hospital was included in the study.
- The patients included in the study were of few limited countries such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Ghana, Oman, Bangladesh etc.

## 11. Future Prospects of the Study

the hospital responsiveness. 44% of the patients were satisfied with the bill transparency in the hospital. Majority of the patients were very satisfied with the doctors of the hospital. 74% of the patients were very satisfied with the time spent with doctors in the consultation, 40% of them were very satisfied with the consent process, 70% of them were very satisfied with the personal knowledge of the doctor himself and 66% of them were very satisfied with the doctor in context to the explanation of the problem or the treatment to them. 62% of the patients were very satisfied with the clean uniform of the nurses, 32% of them were satisfied with the courtesy and response of the nurses to the patients, 50% of the patients were fairly satisfied with the personal knowledge of nurses with respect to the problem and the treatment, 34% of the patients were satisfied with the way that the nurses makes the patients feel safe and only 30% patients were fairly satisfied with the communication skills of the nurses. It was observed that the patients came out to be satisfied with the infection control of the hospital. About 46% of them were satisfied with the washing of hands by the staff before and after checking the patients or performing any kind procedure. 44% of them were very satisfied with the cleanliness of the wards, ICU's and the rooms. 38% of the patients were satisfied with the number of times the rooms or the wards were being cleaned. It was observed that 44% of the patients were not satisfied the quality of the food. 56% of them were very satisfied with the hygiene level of the food that was being maintained by the hospital. 34% of them were fairly satisfied with the service of providing food on time on the table of the patient. 56% of the patients were very satisfied with the diet as recommended by the dietician.

## 7. DISCUSSION

Majority of the medical tourists visited India only for the treatment. Low cost was not the primary reason for their visit to India, instead the better quality of the treatment, services, doctors and staff brought them to India. Medical Tourists seemed to be highly satisfied with the Doctors and fairly satisfied with the nurses and the services. They were

This study does not cover all the areas of medical tourism. Certain points could be covered by researchers in the future such as-

- a. More hospitals can be taken into study from all over India and number of sample size can be increased.
- b. Focus on the outreach programs and build awareness about Medical Tourism through them. For example- camps, road shows and other marketing strategies.
- c. Streamline registration and approval of the facilitators by the Government of India.

- d. JCI and NABH accreditation of hospitals plays an important role in quality of medical facilities and services along with the quality care and reputation of the doctors.

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