



WORLD CLASS MEDICARE FACILITIES AT THE NEW HOSPITALS: Surgeon Ramakant Panda with his patient at the Asian Heart Institute

Drop By, It's Good For Your Health

Medicare is the latest reason to visit India. As speciality hospitals proliferate across the country offering world-class surgery, many foreigners are checking in and availing of the cost benefits. **S Mrinal** and **Nandu Manjeshwar** report on a trend which is catching.

When multi-speciality hospital Jaslok was launched in 1973 in Bombay, its ritzy facilities were scoffed at for their classy comforts. It was unimaginable that hospitals could offer such luxury at that time. Today, many private hospitals in India's major cities offer far more than Jaslok did, but no one seems to take notice. Affluent Indians have now become accustomed to medical care that compares with the best globally.

Not long ago, wealthy Indians would zip to famous hospitals round the world for delicate or risky surgery. That too is changing. Patients are now trickling in for medical care from the US and Europe. The next outsourcing wave from the Western world may well be in medical care, which fits in with India's focus on the hard currency earnings potential of its skilled manpower.

The new private hospitals, with state-of-the-art facilities that are comparable with the best in the world, are increasingly finding that the need for their services now extends far beyond the local community they were initially envisaged to serve. According to Prathap Reddy, chairman of the Apollo Group, which is the largest hospital group in Asia and manages 35 hospitals in India and Sri Lanka, one out

of every 10 patients in his hospitals is from abroad. That is roughly the proportion in another speciality hospital in Mumbai; the Asian Heart Institute, according to its founder, cardiac surgeon Ramakant Panda.

Reddy says that the number of foreign visitors to India for medical treatment has grown from 10,000 to 100,000 in the last five years. With an annual growth of 30 per cent in the number of overseas residents that visit India for medicare, India is emerging as a destination for medical tourism and gradually catching up with Singapore — an established medical hub that attracts over 150,000 medical tourists annually from across the world.

Currently, the majority of patients coming to India are from West Asia and Africa and non-resident Indians from everywhere who are mixing a holiday in the homeland with medical attention. As yet, it is just a trickle from the US and Europe so far, due to the fact that insurance companies have yet to come to grips with the facilities that are provided by major Indian hospitals. Those who come from these countries are predominantly the uninsured — and they are a substantial grouping considering that medical insurance is very expensive — who are

paying their way through. In the UK, its public healthcare system, the National Health Service, does not send patients abroad for treatment. But things might just change. The NHS has indicated that India is a 'favoured destination' for surgeries.

A joint study by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and McKinsey & Co. shows that at the current pace of growth, healthcare for foreigners can rake in over \$2 billion in additional revenue by 2012, up from its current level of \$333 million. Much of this could come from patients from the developed world.

The mood is upbeat about India's health care potential as the business, with over four million employees, is among the largest in the services sector. Consequently, the central government, the state governments, private hospitals and travel agencies are working overtime to get their act together to cash in on the potential. B Suman, director of Kerala Tourism Board says, "We have shortlisted 15 multi-speciality hospitals of international standards in Kerala. They are being brought together with the hotels and travel agencies to foster partnerships in order to promote medical tourism to the state."

Maharashtra, among India's industri-

SURGERY AT ESCORTS: IT'S A HEART THING

"ESCORTS is the largest cardiac care hospital in the world," says Naresh Trehan, executive director and cardiac surgeon who has been associated with the institute since its inception 16 years ago. The 328-bed hospital has nine operation theatres, five CAT labs, two heart command centres and a heart station besides a host of other facilities. Over 88,000 angiographies, 19,000 angioplasties and 48,000 cardiac surgical procedures have been performed at Escorts since its inception.

Howard Staab, a 54-year old carpenter from Durham, North Carolina, became an instant beacon for those seeking affordable surgeries. His story appeared in the *Washington Post* titled 'In India, First World Care, Third World Cost' on October 21, 2004. The Post wrote that the same surgery would have cost Staab \$200,000, an impossible sum to bear, 'so he outsourced the job to India', at a cost of just \$10,000.

That included round-trip airfare, hospital charges and a side-trip to the Taj Mahal! "We always ask our patients if



SURGEON TREHAN (R) WITH JAMES FLYNN (C) AND MRS FLYNN AT ESCORTS

they would like to do any sightseeing after their recuperation," says Navneet Malhotra, general manager (hospitality), Escorts Heart Institute & Research Centre.

Another recent patient was James

Flynn from Australia. Flynn underwent cardiac surgery at Escorts, and was satisfied with the experience. "I'd certainly recommend Escorts to my friends back home, if they ever need cardiac treatment," says Flynn.

alised states, also has a medical tourism council that works closely with P D Hinduja Hospital in Mumbai and other private hospitals in the state to promote medical care for overseas patients. India's IT hub, Karnataka, is setting up a Bangalore International Health City which will cater to international patients.

The reasons for coming to India can be varied. Gregory Bates, the former power lifting champ from the UK, had chest pain while holidaying in Goa last year. He agreed to be operated at Mumbai's Wockhardt Hospital, rather than go back home and wait in a long queue. "He wouldn't have agreed to be operated here, had he not been convinced of the quality of treatment here," says Vishal Bali, vice president, Wockhardt Hospitals Ltd. After undergoing coronary by-pass surgery at Wockhardt, Bates said of his experience in India, "There are hospitals here which give medical care similar to what the best hospitals in the world offer."

After returning, Bates spread the mes-

Comparative Price List

Surgery	Cost in the US (\$)	Cost in India (\$)
Bone Marrow Transplant	400,000	30,000
Liver Transplant	500,000	40,000
Open Heart Surgery (CABG)	50,000	4,400
Neuro surgery	29,000	8000
Knee Surgery	16,000	4,500

Source: IBEF

sage of quality health care and three more patients came to India for treatment from the UK. What makes Bates, and other patients from overseas comfortable in Indian hospitals, is that they are staffed by medical experts who have worked either in US, UK, Europe or Australia. They are familiar with medical standards and procedures in these countries. According to the CII report, the Indian specialists, who run their private hospitals, have performed over 500,000 major surgeries and over a million other surgical procedures (such as cardiothoracic, neurological and cancer surgeries) in the last five years. Their success rate is comparable with the best in the world.

For instance, at Asian Heart Institute, which on an average performs six heart surgeries in a day, Panda says, "The success rate for coronary bypass surgery is 99.5 per cent." This is the same as at Cleveland, with which it has an association. Last year Asian Heart got patients from 38 countries. That included Belgium, Holland and the UK. Wockhardt had patients from US, Denmark and Holland besides the UK. Indian medical experts have been the main draw for patients coming.

Be it the New Delhi's Escorts Heart Institute and Research Centre which performs over 4,000 heart operations in a year; the Apollo group which has 6,400 beds spread over 35 hospitals, Mumbai's Wockhardt Hospital which is an associate of Harvard Medical International; Mumbai's Breach Candy -- all of them have a cracking record. Whether it is a bone marrow transplant, kidney transplant, hip joint or knee replacement, neurosurgery, ophthalmology, spine surgery or minimal access surgery, Indian medical professionals are

SPECIALITY HOSPITALS



ESCORTS HEART INSTITUTE & RESEARCH CENTRE LTD, NEW DELHI

No. of beds: 325
www.ehirc.com

BREACH CANDY, MUMBAI

No. of beds: 173
www.breachcandyhospital.org

WOCKHARDT HOSPITALS

No of hospitals 3 No. of beds: 420
www.wockhardthospitals.com



ASIAN HEART INSTITUTE, MUMBAI

No. of beds: 250
www.ahirc.com

PD HINDUJA NATIONAL HOSPITAL & MEDICAL RESEARCH CENTRE, MUMBAI

No. of beds: 351
www.hindujahospital.com

JASLOK HOSPITAL, MUMBAI

No. of beds: 376
www.jaslokhospital.net



APOLLO HOSPITALS

No. of hospitals: 35 No. of beds: 6400
www.apollohospitals.com

proving to be comparable to the best in the world.

But what is really bringing patients to India is the soaring cost of healthcare in many Western countries. For example, Azim Premji, a Tanzanian politician of Asian origin, had the option to go to UK but came to India for his coronary by-pass surgery because his friends advised him, "India is the best for heart surgery." The cost of treatment was an equally important issue. "Europe would have been at least three to four times more expensive," he says. Premji came to Mumbai's Asian Heart Institute with his wife and two daughters and they were in the city for three weeks. The total cost of the family's visit, including Premji's hospital bill, was much less than what Premji would have paid for his surgery in the UK.

The long queues for cardiac and other surgeries is another reason why patients have preferred to come to India for private medical treatment from the UK. For example, the waiting list for angiogram is three months, for angioplasty it is six months and for a by-pass, it is a year or more in the UK.

Mumbai has 10 to 15 major private hospitals, many more than in London. The London hospitals, like Cromwell and Prince Grace, are small — between the size of hospitals and nursing homes — and costly. "It costs a patient going to private healthcare for heart surgery around 25,000 pounds. In India its just 4,300 pounds, including the cost of travel," says Sudhir Vaishnav, cardiologist at Asian Heart Institute.

Healthcare in India is the cheapest in the world, say many medical experts. A prominent Indian business magazine reported the case of Henry McInnes, a software engineer based in Seattle, who not only had his root canal treatment done in Bangalore last year, but also enjoyed a vacation for just \$4000 - the amount that he would have otherwise spent in US for his treatment.

A little known aspect of Indian medical care is its state-of-the-art diagnostic set up. While all major hospitals have their own pathological labs, very specialised central reference laboratories like SRL, Ranbaxy and Nicholas Piramal & Dr Phadke's Labs (NPPL) have come up. They offer the testing facilities that require specialised skills and technology that hospitals

themselves can't afford, as volumes are small and it doesn't pay to maintain the full fledged set up. While NPPL is accredited by the National Accreditation Board of Laboratories in India, SRL has in addition accreditation from the College of American Laboratories. This has enabled the lab to tie up with institutions in the UK and Europe for its services.

For all its advantages, India still gets only a trickle of medical tourists from US and Europe. So what's holding them back? Until recently there wasn't much of an attempt to promote Indian medical care in these countries. While each hospital had a travel desk arrangement with travel agencies, there was no formal tie-up for promoting medical tourism.

This is changing now. Cox & King, a Mumbai-London based travel group, has tied-up with Vedic India, a medical body that promotes medical tourism to India. Thomas Cook is studying possible tie-ups with various hospitals carefully before launching its service. The Swiss travel major Kuoni and its Indian subsidiary Sita Travels have tied up with overseas agencies that focus on medical tourism.

Hospitals themselves are now beefing up their marketing teams. Apollo has an international marketing team that manages in-bound patients from various countries. Asian Heart Institute is launching its coordination centre in London in the current year. And, Wockhardt has recruited an executive to head its division for promoting its services abroad.

However, the ultimate baseline for global promotion is accreditation, as without accreditation, health insurance majors will not reimburse patients. The Apollo group and Escorts Heart Institute are seeking certification from the US-based Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organisations. But, despite not having accreditation from the JCI, there are hospitals that have managed tie-ups with insurance companies in US. For example, Wockhardt has a tie-up with the largest health insurance company in the US, Blue Cross & Blue Shield Association.

India has the right mix of medical skills and value-for-money offerings. And it has doctors with good bedside manners. It is just a matter of time before that healthy combination opens up to the vast opportunities in medical tourism.