

BOOMING MEDICAL TOURISM: NO CARE FOR POOR



India has become the world center of Medical Tourism. More and more westerners decide every year to travel to this country to receive cheap and quality medical treatment. This development, however, makes the health care unaffordable to the poor locals.

The government invests huge sums of money into the medical tourism industry, as it is able to generate significant revenues. Rich foreigners enjoy Indian Medical care that is often as much as eight times cheaper than treatment in their own home country. New big luxury hospitals are mushrooming in India and the government subsidizes them. Many of the private hospitals are registered under the Public Trust Act and they are obliged to provide free service of up to 20% of their capacity and therefore they are exempted from income tax. There are also tax and duty waivers on import of equipment given by the officials to the private hospitals. The condition, that one-third of the beds would be made available free of cost to poor patients is however often not fulfilled. For example, in 1999-2000 in Apollo Hospital only some 2% of indoor cases were treated free and most of these were relatives of staff, bureaucrats and politicians.

The boom in the medical tourism industry has increased the demand for skilled medical staff. Nowadays, increasing number of qualified medical professionals from the public sector and small towns or hospitals is attracted to the metropolitan health centers. Because of this development, only 30% of rural population does actually have an access to proper health care. Many of the poor Indians do not seek any treatment at all as the cost for private practitioners is far beyond their financial possibilities.

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