Introduction

Medical Tourism:

Medical Tourism synonymous with the words like health tourism, medical travel or global healthcare and has become a universal concept gaining importance.

The word was first used by travel agencies and is today used by media, government, tourism development corporations etc.

However precise definition is given by Connell (2006) which is more comprehensive as it includes the several dimensions of medical tourism. He describes medical tourism as a popular mass culture where people travel to overseas countries to obtain healthcare services and facilities such as medical, dental and surgical care whilst having the opportunity to visit the tourist spots of that country.

The countries which have become the best destination include Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and India for Healthcare also sometimes referred to as Healthcare Hub.

Foreign Exchange Earnings:

Foreign Exchange Earnings here or in this context includes all the foreign currency inflows on current account of balance of payments brought in by foreign tourists for payments towards treatments, accommodation, travelling etc. which leads to foreign exchange earnings for a country of destination.

Foreign Exchange Earnings is defined as proceeds from the exports of goods and services of a country, and the returns from its foreign investments, denominated in convertible currency.

Tourism earnings in foreign exchange are considered as deemed exports.

Evolution of Medical Tourism:

The concept of medical tourism is not a new one. The first recorded instance of medical dates back thousands of years to when Greek pilgrimages traveled from all over the Mediterranean to
the small territory in the Saronic Gulf called Epidauria. The territory was the sanctuary of the healing god Asklepios. Epidauria became the original travel destination for medical tourism.

Spa towns and sanitariums may be considered an early form of medical tourism. In eighteenth century England, for example, patients visited spas because they were places with supposedly health-giving mineral waters, treating diseases from gout to liver disorders and bronchitis.

From 18th century wealthy Europeans traveled to spas from Germany to the Nile. In the 21st century, relatively low-cost jet travel has taken the industry beyond the wealthy and desperate.

**Need for Medical Tourism:**

Medical tourism has become a common form of vacationing, and covers a broad spectrum of medical services. It mixes leisure, fun and relaxation together with wellness and healthcare. The idea of the health holiday is to offer you an opportunity to get away from your daily routine and come into different relaxing surroundings. Here you can enjoy being close to the beaches and mountains. At the same time you are able to receive an orientation that will help you improve your life in terms of your health and general well-being. It is like rejuvenation and cleanup process at all the levels- physical, mental and emotional. Many people from the developed world come to India for the rejuvenation promised by yoga and Ayurvedic massage, but only a few consider it a destination for hip replacement or brain surgery. However, a nice blend of top-class medical expertise at attractive prices is helping a growing number of Indian corporate hospitals lure foreign patients, including a few from developed nations such as UK and the US.

**Scope for Medical Tourism:**

With the internationally recognized healthcare professionals, holistic medicinal services and low cost of treatment, India has the potential to attract over one million health tourist every year, according to Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). The country offers a unique mix of systems such as yoga, ayurveda and meditation and modern medical system. This along with world class experts and the cost advantage can earn $ 5 billion every year, a CII release said. While a heart surgery costs $ 30,000 in the US, it costs $6,000 in India. Similarly, a bone marrow transplant costs $26,000 here as compared to $250,000 in the US. If the liver transplant costs in the range of Rs60-70 lakhs in the Europe and double that in the US, a few Indian hospitals such as Global
in Hyderabad, have the wherewithal to do it around Rs15-20 lakhs. Similarly, if a heart surgery in the US costs about Rs.20 lakhs, the Chennai headquartered Apollo Hospital Group does it roughly for Rs2 lakhs. Dental, eye and cosmetic surgeries in Western countries costs three to four times as much as in India.

The Indian government predicts that India’s $17 billion a year health care industry could grow 13 per cent in each of the next six years boosted by medical tourism, which industry watchers say is growing at 30 per cent annually. Price advantage is, of course, a major selling point as compared to the cost in the West.

NRIs and the tourists around the world are beginning to realize the potential of modern and traditional Indian medicine. Indian hospitals and medical establishments have also realized the potential of this niche market and have begun to tailor their services for foreign visitors. At a regional level, this nascent industry came to lime-light with the arrival of ‘Naby Noor’ from Pakistan, who came by the Indo-Pak bus service and got a red-carpet treatment at a hospital in Bangalore. Several Indian state governments have realized the potential of this industry and have been actively promoting it.

**Process:**

The typical process for medical tourism is as follows: the person seeking medical treatment abroad contacts a medical tourism provider. The provider usually requires the patient to provide a medical report, including the nature of ailment, local doctors’ opinion, medical history, and diagnosis, and may request additional information. Certified medical doctors or consultants then advise on the medical treatment. The approximate expenditure, choice of hospitals and tourist destination, and duration of stay etc.is discussed. After signing consent bonds and agreements, the patient is given recommendation letter for a medical visa, to be procured from the concerned embassy. The patient travels to the destination country, where the medical tourism provider assigns a case executive, who takes care of the patient’s accommodation, treatment and any other form of care. Once the treatment is done, the patient can remain in the tourist destination or return home.

The study will aim to study the potential of medical tourism in depth and find out the areas where more and more foreign tourists can be attracted for medical services. Further the study
will also focus on how foreign exchange earnings can be increased by further promoting India’s medical tourism globally.