

## Medical tourism to earn Rs.80 bn a year by 2012

India is set to earn Rs.80 billion (\$1.87 billion) a year in foreign exchange from medical tourism by 2012, according to a study by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham).

With easy visa facilities to overseas patients coupled with best emerging medical infrastructure facilities, India's medical tourism can become a lead foreign exchange earner and the earnings will grow from the existing Rs.35 billion annually to Rs.80 billion a year by 2012, Assocham president Venugopal N. Dhoot said.

The study on Prospects of Medical Tourism for Higher Forex Earning was done under the supervision of the health committee of Assocham, headed by Sir Ganga Ram Hospital chairman B.K. Rao.

'The primary reasons as to why medical tourism would flourish in India include much lower medical treatment costs for various ailments, such as bone narrow transparent, bye-pass surgery, knee surgery and liver transplant as compared to western countries,' Dhoot said in a statement Monday.

'The cost of medical treatment is very high in the western countries, forcing patients from Africa, the Gulf and various other Asian countries to explore medical treatment in India,' he said.

He noted that the medical infrastructure in the country has geared up to provide them non-subsidized medical treatment at far lower costs.

Other factors boosting medical tourism include India's strength in traditional treatment in homeopathy, naturopathy, ayurvedic and unani systems which are becoming very popular because they do not have side effects, said Dhoot.

He called for more allocation for the health sector which would lead to proliferation of new health facilities and centres of medical excellence, which in turn will finally be able to service overseas patients.

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