

Medical tourism a good option for NRIs to save costs

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South super star Rajnikanth flying to Singapore for treatment is the talking point these days. The reason to fly to a foreign country could have been better medical facilities, a friend's advice or just the comfort factor. The southern star's case was a classic case of emergency.

However, there are many patients – especially expatriates – who plan their surgeries or medical treatment in foreign countries or cities to benefit from lower healthcare costs without any compromise on the quality of the treatment.

Good option for NRIs

"It is a good option for people staying abroad, who are not insured/underinsured because of the high cost differential in medical facilities between India and other countries," says Rahul Aggarwal, CEO of Optima Insurance Brokers. "In the UK for instance, every medical treatment has to be routed via the NHS (National Health Service). There are few options when it comes to private doctors in the UK. As a result, a patient has to wait for a very long time to get his/her turn.

Hence, countries such as India and Singapore have a clear edge over western countries, both in terms of the number of hospitals and the cost advantage," says Aggarwal. Within India, an individual can think of going to only smaller towns, which may come with a host of other issues. "The social overhead cost of smaller towns is lower because of cheaper paramedical staff cost and outdated equipment, which can compromise the overall quality of treatment," says Aggarwal. New Delhi gets the maximum medical tourists as it is the capital and has better air connectivity. After New Delhi, the preferred destinations are Chennai and Hyderabad, say experts.

"Patients from the the US, UK and Europe give a lot of importance to JCI accreditation." "I would advise patient to give more importance to the doctor than the hospital," says Radhakrishna Chamarty, director of India Insure Risk Management and Insurance Broking Services. "The surgeon or the specialist makes a bigger difference than the hospital. In fact, the same specialist may practise at different hospitals. You can choose one of those hospitals rather than settling for the brand of the hospital."

It is not just the treatment or the doctor's fees that matters. You have to put a rupee value to every service and goods before and after hospitalisation to know the accurate cost of the entire exercise. Then you will be able to make fair comparisons across different cities and hospitals.