

Medical tourism: New Zealand medical tourists' experiences in India: touristic and diasporic connections

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Abstract

This paper considers the phenomenon of medical tourism, which is the travel abroad for elective medical treatment (including cosmetic and dental treatment). India is one of the most popular global destinations for citizens and residents of mainly Western nations, seeking medical treatment, due to its highly competitive costs, and the good reputation of its hospitals, clinics and medical practitioners. This paper reports on a study of New Zealanders who have travelled abroad for medical treatment. Of the participants, a small number travelled to India. We focus on this group to consider their motivations, experiences and outcomes from their medical travel to India. For some participants, the choice of India as a medical tourism destination was linked strongly to past travel experiences and previous destination choices (South vs. North). One group of participants included Indian migrants who had settled in New Zealand. This group were motivated to seek medical treatment in India often because of cost and familiarity, but family and professional connections also played a key role. And for some participants, poor experiences (as recent migrants) within the New Zealand public health system 'pushed' them towards seeking treatment in India, despite such treatment being potentially freely available in New Zealand. The paper also explores why, for the wider group of participants, India did not feature upon their list of desirable medical tourism destinations, exploring themes of knowledge, ignorance, fear, distrust and racism. We situate our findings within the broader emerging data on medical tourists' experiences within the rapidly growing global market for medical services.

Key words: *Medical tourism; India; New Zealand; destination; medical outcomes.*