

## Field visit report on Medical/Health Tourism Service Sector

Presented below is the interaction with Dr. Sushrut Babhulkar, a leading orthopedic surgeon of Nagpur, who is trying to develop medical tourism in his own special way.

Dr. Sushrut Sudhir Babhulkar, is a graduate and Post-Graduate (MS Orthopaedics) from Indira Gandhi Medical College, Nagpur. He then did his Masters Degree from Liverpool University, England M Ch (Orthopaedics) in 1994 and during the same time worked at various centers of Excellence in UK like Royal Liverpool University Hospital, Fazakarley Hospital etc. in 1995.

Dr. Sushrut is actively involved in joint replacement surgeries of Hips, Knees, Shoulders and elbows employing all varieties of implants like cemented and non-cemented options. Till now he has performed more than 2,000 Joint Replacements of various kinds and has made the patients pain free and mobile.

The Times of India, Nagpur Edition recently reported that Dr. Sushrut is one amongst the few doctors of Nagpur taking innovative steps to boost medical tourism in the region. Presented below is a one on one meeting with the pioneer himself

Q. Tell us about the type of medical/health tourism being practiced at your esteemed institution?

“Sushrut Hospital and Research Centre” is a super specialty orthopedic hospital specializing in Hip and Knee replacement surgery. The foreign patient undergoes the medical intervention and on the 6<sup>th</sup> day he has the option of either recuperating in the hospital or a package to Kanha Tiger Resort. During his travel to Kanha, the patient is accompanied by an expert orthopedic surgeon, a physiotherapist and a nurse. On reaching Kanha, the doctors come back put the nurse stays on and returns along with the patient. The stitches are then removed and the patient then goes back to his native country, hale and hearty!

Besides, the hospital also has its independent web portal [www.sushrut.org](http://www.sushrut.org) where all the facilities on offer are available in details including the profile of the doctors attached to the hospital

Q. Has there been an increase in the number of foreign patients (from the reported four in a month)?

There is a definite increase in the number of overseas enquiry that the hospital is receiving and so far has treated 8 European patients

Q. The patients belong to which countries?

Most of them are from Europe belonging to different countries

Q. What are the orthopedic interventions that are mostly sought?

Joint replacement

Q. Is the concept of medical tourism popular amongst the other hospitals in Nagpur (for dental and heart interventions)?

It is still in its infancy and other hospitals are just waking up to the concept of medical tourism

Q. What makes you promote medical tourism so actively?

Nagpur is where I belong and it has the capability to develop into a reputed medical tourism hub provided we develop our infrastructure to global standards. Moreover it has far less problems that places like Mumbai have, important being traffic congestion and for a doctor time is the most precious thing that can make a difference between wellness and pain

Q. When do you foresee Nagpur becoming a medical tourism hub in the near future?

If we develop on the fronts that we are presently lacking like good infrastructure, better flight connectivity, and reputed medical institutes, there is no reason why Nagpur cannot take its rightful place amongst other cities offering medical tourism

Q. What are the changes required on the ground for medical tourism to take off in Nagpur?

Realizing the true potential of medical tourism, developing the infrastructure, initiatives from the government, reputed hospitals and doctors effectively marketing the services that they have to offer

Q. Have the Indian insurance companies woken up to the opportunity that medical tourism offers? Has insurance been an issue in the interventions that you have done?

The insurance companies are ready to offer cover to the patients who need major medical interventions and the doctors too are supportive to their cause. But when it comes to settlement of the bill raised by the doctors for their services offered, there is a long delay of over six months unlike in U.S. and Europe.

Dr. Sushrut expressed apprehension that if this situation continues, the day will not be far when doctors will be reluctant to treat patients who come through the insurance agencies.

Q. Is Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation trying to develop the tourist's locations in and around Nagpur that could boost medical tourism?

The department is absolutely unaware of this great opportunity on offer!

Q. What are the present day hurdles in the path of medical tourism growth in Nagpur?

Lack of dedicated medical practitioners, poor infrastructure, low flight connectivity, no renowned tour operators and government apathy.

Q. Does Nagpur really stand a chance to become a major player in Medical tourism considering the type of competition it is facing from the metros and the southern cities?

Nagpur has everything that can help it become a leading city offering medical tourism. The infrastructure is new and upcoming and not under severe pressure like in other metro cities. There are also many renowned doctors who are coming back to their roots after having wide international hands on experience and exposure with the sole ambition of serving the patients. Thus the potential should be tapped optimally to take Nagpur up the ladder of a medical tourism hub.

Q. What is your perspective of the controversy surrounding medical tourism that it will deprive the poor of the services of quality doctors?

Dr. Sushrut entirely deferred on this point. He said that a few years ago, Indian doctors traveled abroad to earn dollars and it was criticized as brain drain. Now, when we have the potential to earn foreign exchange for our country sitting right here in India, we should look at this opportunity positively rather than skeptically

Q. Does Sushrut hospital have any formal tie-up with the star hotels of Nagpur who offer tourist packages or for putting up the foreign patients?

The hospital has tie up with "Tuli International" for arranging the recuperation vacation to Kanha Tiger Resort. Regarding tie-ups for the stay of the patients, he is having discussions with top hotels in Mumbai like "Grand Hyatt" to put up "Level 1" patients and "Hyatt Regency"

for accommodating “Level 2” patients as these hotels are situated close to the airport from where it shall be convenient for them to take a flight to Nagpur

Q. Is accreditation an issue with the patients who seek medical intervention?

It definitely is an issue for the patients as accreditation gives an assurance to the patient who is putting his life into the hands of doctors in an alien land in many cases. Sushrut hospital on its part has an ISO certification and is pursuing the other essential accreditation required for a super specialty hospital promoting medical tourism

Q. Could you please elaborate on the positive feedback received from the patients who have availed of your treatment?

The patients who have availed the services at Sushrut hospital are all praises and extremely excited about the experience they had in Nagpur. The wellness and comfort that they experience after having undergone the surgery is beyond description. The word of mouth publicity is also helping in bringing new patients to seek medical assistance in Nagpur. Thus Nagpur has a bright future provided we take the right measures at the right time.

The other important issues on which Dr. Sushrut touched upon was the fact that he has opened an office in Mumbai that has a Medical Coordinator as well as a Travel Coordinator. The medical coordinator is a qualified medical practitioner who received all the medical queries as well as is responsible for the monitoring of the basic health parameter of the patient upon arrival in India, Mumbai being the first touch down destination. Thus right from his arrival in India Dr. Sushrut has ensured that the patient is in safe hands and feels assured of things to come. This initiative will go a long way in encouraging patients to come to Nagpur and get them treated rather than stop at Mumbai and face all the hassles of a congested city.

He also said that doctors at Nagpur would have to ensure that the cost of medical treatment is kept cheap compared to the cost in other cities despite the fact that the patient has to travel from the metro cities to Nagpur.

Another important sector in the medical/health tourism service sector is the hospitality industry. Presented below are inputs from the hospitality sector.

Dr. Sushrut Babhulkar has a tie-up with Hotel “Tuli International”, a leading five star hotel in Nagpur for providing recuperative trip to the patients to “Kanha” – a popular Tiger resort located close to Nagpur.

Given below is a brief interview with Mr. Anurag Dayal, Assistant Manager, Sales & Marketing, Hotel Tuli International.

Q. Since when has Tuli tied-up with Sushrut Hospital and Research Centre for offering trips to Kanha for the patients?

The tie-up happened about 3-4 years ago.

Q. How many medical tourists have visited Kanha since the last couple of years under this agreement?

Unfortunately, none of the medical tourists who were treated by Dr. Babhulkar have availed the Kanha resort package due to constraints of time and also because most of the patients were old and did not want to undertake an additional journey.

Q. To which states do the visitors going to Kanha belong?

Most of the visitors going to Kanha are foreigners, but it is also very popular among the local Nagpurians and visitors from other places in Maharashtra. Some people are also exploring the possibilities of having marriages conducted in the resort

Q. In your knowledge, is the Tourism Development Corporation taking special initiatives to promote Kanha as a tiger resort?

The tourism department is not at all involved in this, as it is a private initiative of Hotel Tuli International. The hotel on its part adheres to the rules that apply to the other resorts functioning in the state of Madhya Pradesh (MP) as the Kanha reserve is in the jurisdiction of the MP government.

Q. Does Tuli have tie-ups with other hospitals of Nagpur for offering the Kanha Package?

No

Q. What government incentives does the hospitality sector need for tourism to flourish in places like Nagpur?

No special incentives in particular.

Q. How has this resort contributed in the local micro-region?

The resort employs substantial local people for the odd jobs that are required to be done at the resort. Therefore in terms of employment generation, the resort has contributed substantially in the social upliftment of the local population. In addition, many small service providers have sprung up in the areas leading up to Kanha.

***The interactions in this visit report will serve as important inputs for finalizing the case study on medical tourism that is presently being developed at our end.***