

City gets medical visa power boost!

Bangalore may become health hub as visa hurdles go

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Bangalore: With the Centre introducing medical visas for foreigners seeking speciality treatment in India, a major hurdle in the way of Bangalore emerging as a global health destination has been cleared. The medical fraternity is excited.

"It is an excellent development" says Dr Devi Shetty, Managing Director, Narayana Hrudalaya. "It saves patients from unnecessary trouble. About 25 per cent of the patients in our hospital are foreigners, especially from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Africa and the Middle East. They get a tourist visa only for 15 days. Once it expires, they become illegal residents and they will have to run from pillar to post to get it extended."

Dr Arun Samprathi, eye surgeon at Narayana Netralaya, agrees. Last week, Dr Arun successfully treated Mahad, a Karachi-based boy at Narayana Netralaya. Mahad's parents had come to India on a tourist visa. It took more than 40 days for them to get a clearance from Indian Embassy to extend their visa. Mahad's grandfather had to go all the way from Bangalore to Delhi.

Bangalore's main attraction is its cost-effectiveness. For instance, a cataract operation costs 1,500 pounds in the UK. In India, it costs only Rs



Where do govt hospitals stand?

Bangalore has well-equipped super-speciality government hospitals, but where do they stand in the map of health tourism?

"Patients come to India not only from developed countries but also from poor nations. The poor cannot afford treatment at private hospitals. If they are treated at government hospitals, they can save money and the government can earn rich foreign exchange, which can be used for providing subsidy to poor patients in our country," says Dr I B Vijayalaxmi,

cardiologist, Jayadeva Institute of Cardiology. Though hospitals such as Jayadeva and Kidwai are well equipped, the government is ignoring their development. "For instance, two floors of Jayadeva Hospital, which had been earmarked for 250 beds, are still vacant."

When asked about it, Health Commissioner M Sanaula said the panel of doctors set up under a High Court directive to look into the functioning of government hospitals has taken up these issues. It will come up with some ideas.

10,000-15,000.

Dr Vivek Jawali, chief cardiologist, Wockhardt, insists foreign patients should be least exposed to bureaucracy.

In the last two to three years the department of tourism, in association with department of health, introduced some measures to popularise

Bangalore as a global health destination. "However, we started receiving complaints from hospitals regarding visa hassles. Now that the Centre has come up with the idea of providing medical visa, it will boost our efforts," said Mahendra Jain, Commissioner of Tourism.