

Nigerians prefer Indian hospitals – Prabhakar

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Joe Prabhakar

President of the Get Well Medical Tourism, Joe Prabhakar, tells Tope Omogbolagun that Indian doctors who are trained in the US and UK return home to develop their health sector

What is medical tourism?

Medical tourism is a kind of medical services provided to take people abroad for medical treatment. It is put in place in order to ensure that people who need medical treatment outside the country are treated at good hospitals where they can be given the appropriate medical attention basically in India.

We discovered that when people need medical services, they go online to browse the names of hospitals abroad. But we also discovered that people do not get the right treatment because they go to the hospitals that are not specialised in

their ailment. Medical tourism facilitators are therefore charged with the responsibility of helping people get good medical services. We take care of patients, get their medical records and send them to India for a hospital check up and the doctors send back their medical plan, cost and everything that is needed to us and we inform the patients.

We even allow the patients to communicate with the doctors before travelling. The idea is to build a relationship between the two parties before they eventually meet themselves. We also arrange for their visas, tickets and when they reach India, we have people who receive them at the airport, take them to the hospital and make sure they are treated well. After the patients have recuperated, they can even go on small holidays to beach resort or other places in the country. When they return home, we also have local doctors in Nigeria that do a follow-up treatment on them. These doctors are not necessarily trained in Indian. They are reputable doctors who have been practising here in Nigeria. These doctors communicate with our doctors in India in order to know what to do as a follow up to the treatment the patients have had earlier.

Why do people prefer India to other countries?

The major reason why people prefer India to other countries like the US and UK is because medical services over there are very expensive but in India, you can get those medical services at one tenth of what is charged in the US and UK. For example, a certain type of surgery that costs between \$100,000 and \$120,000 in the US and UK costs just \$10,000 in India.

How does India provide such services at a cheaper rate?

Most countries in Europe and in the US have compulsory insurance cover which increases hospitals' charges but in India, there are no compulsory insurance policies. Indian doctors are trained in Europe and the US but they return home to work in their hospitals. India has one of the best medical services in the world today and their doctors like to work at home.

How much publicity does medical tourism enjoy?

From the research that I carried out last year, I discovered that about 5,000 Nigerians have travelled out of Nigeria for treatment although not only to India. I also discovered that about N39bn was spent by Nigerians for treatments in India alone.

How affordable is the service to an average Nigerian?

I won't say it's really affordable but I have learnt that Nigerians are good hearted people who help people in need. It is affordable for an average Nigerian to get treated in India than in the US or UK.

Apart from surgery, what other medical services are available for people in India?

It is a very long-list, which include cardiac treatment, knee replacement, cancer treatment, spinal surgery, liver and kidney transplant, paediatric surgery, dermatology, orthopaedics, anaesthesiology, vascular surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology and urology, among others.

How many branches do you have here in Nigeria?

At the moment we have just two branches in Lagos and Kano. But we are hoping to have a branch in Abuja very soon.

How did India suddenly become preferred nation for major health treatment?

In India, parents place great value on the education of their children. Most children in India now want to be doctors. The country is taking the advantage of technological advancement to develop its society.

The problem with Nigeria is that the system does not give room for development. The government should help the doctors to develop. I can't say Nigeria does not have good doctors because I have met a lot of Nigerian doctors outside the country who are doing very well.

How assured are patients of receiving full recovery through medical tourism?

It depends on the type of treatment they are going for. For example, a person travelling for knee surgery is more likely to return to Nigeria with perfect knee. But if it is cancer surgery, they have to continue recovery at home in Nigeria.

What is the staff strength of Nigerians working with you?

We really do not need much staff at this point but as we grow, we would employ more staff who are Nigerians. For example, in my own office, I am the only Indian as there are more Nigerians. They are also trained according to what we need in order to ensure that we have the right facts for our patients.

Medical tourism has put India on the map and has become number one in medical tourism in South-Asia. They have beaten the records of Thailand. The country has a better service ratio than the US in terms of doctor/nurses ratio and so on. It's a hospitable nation with good people just like Nigeria. Medical tourism generates foreign exchange for the government. For Nigerians, they get treated and become healthy people. It fosters international relations among the two nations.