CHAPTER 3
CO-BRANDING MEDICAL TOURISM WITH
TRADITIONAL INDIAN THERAPIES

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3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the concept of marketing in general and the international marketing strategies for medical tourism in particular. There are various super speciality hospitals and spas providing traditional Indian therapies in Karnataka. They are practicing a number of international marketing strategies to attract foreign medical tourists. On the basis of a survey of literature, an attempt has been made to trace the concept of services marketing, the concept of hospital marketing, and explain the concept and relevance of co-branding of medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies in Karnataka. It also focuses on the marketing mix issues for medical tourism, segmentation, target marketing and product positioning strategies which are currently used. Further, the suitability of the adoption of Kerala model of Medical Tourism to Karnataka is studied. This chapter concludes with the study of scope for innovative marketing strategies in the context of medical tourism and the scope for the extension of medial tourism to malnad region of Karnataka.

3.2 Concept of co-branding

During the past few decades, services have increasingly assumed important role in the economy. Around the world service sector is going through a period of revolutionary change in which established ways of doing business continue to be shunted aside. The vibrant business environment and competition among the service providing organizations have necessitated the need for marketing of services. Today, service organizations use more professional approach in managing their businesses.

**Service marketing strategies for Hospitals:**

In today’s competitive world, the hospitals are banking upon many marketing strategies. Some of them are,

a. Preventive check - ups for the entire body organized by a hospital. With this, they can attract both the domestic and foreign medical tourists.
b. The hospitals can also have eminent personalities from industry in the board of trustees. This can enhance the brand image of the hospital.

c. They can even attract the shareholders by offering discounts. Most of them even have a link with insurance companies. Corporates can be associated with a hospital by offering special discounts.

d. Some of the hospitals discuss the success of crucial operations in health magazines, TV and newspapers. This helps in the brand building exercise of a hospital.

e. Many hospitals hold seminars and conferences relating to specific diseases. For example, diabetes camp can be organized free of cost for the general public. This helps in popularizing the hospital.

The healthcare organizations in the medical tourism front are branding themselves according to their core competencies. Branding helps to develop the image of India as a medical tourism destination. According to Metelka (1981), destination brands generate sets of experiences or images of a place prior to consumption. These images can be classified into two types—functional and symbolic (Etchner and Brent Ritchie, 1991). Morganet al (2002) characterized the attributes along two dimensions—emotional pull and celebrity value. According to them the key to building strong destination brands is to increase the above two variables. A comprehensive list of eleven attributes was detailed by Embacher and Buttle (1989) that created a destinations image. They are: physical environment, economic development, weather/climate, people, culture, food, suitability for children, tourist facilities, infrastructure, suitability for different types of vacation and overall appeal. These dimensions can be used to create a brand and communicate the benefits to the target audience. For example, Indian healthcare organizations are emphasizing quality medical services at a low cost in the course of branding.

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as “a name, term, symbol, design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors”. A brand adds dimensions to a product or service to make it unique. The concept of
branding and creating brand loyalty holds lot of relevance in the healthcare industry. A satisfied patient who got his treatment done with a hospital acts as the most vocal spokesperson of that brand in his community.

Co-branding is the practice of using multiple brand names together on a single product or service. It is a type of branding wherein the firm partners with another cause in the form of its designation as a sponsor or supporter. Co – branding with an existing cause is a means for firms to complement their existing brand image with specific associations that are borrowed or transferred from a cause (Kotler, 2007).

Co-branding can result in the creation of synergy for all the partners in the brand building group. Co – branding leads to partnerships and alliances beneficial to all the players. This is very helpful for the goods or services which are complementary to each other.

Co–branding of medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies creates a holistic bunch of services for a foreign medical tourist. Patients who have undergone major surgery always need rehabilitation. Allopathic doctors cannot assist patients in rehabilitation due to lack of time. It has been found that after surgeries in hospitals, Ayurveda has some excellent treatment for recuperation. As a result, most wellness centres are involved in providing follow up and complimentary services to patients after they undergo a surgery.
3.3 Marketing Strategies for Medical Tourism

In order to tap the growing potential of medical tourists, leading hospitals in the country are using aggressive and focused marketing techniques. Marketing teams of hospitals are visiting international markets, participating in healthcare seminars, and using every opportunity to highlight brand India (Rao, 2006). Apollo Group, which uses an international marketing team that handles in-bound patients from arrival to departure, has branches in the Middle East and Mauritius. The Hinduja hospital has a coordination centre in London to handle registration of patients from Europe. Sankara Nethralaya has entered into alliances abroad to market its healthcare services. Manipal Hospital has established information centres in countries like the UK and the UAE, while the Narayana Hrudayalaya hospital has entered into an alliance with the government of Kenya. The hospital has already opened information centres in Bangladesh and Malaysia.

Competition is triggering innovative marketing strategies by governments, tourism boards and other tourism stakeholders. Progressive policies, expansion of the product range, cross-industry partnerships and customized packages are some of the innovations in this area (Suresh, 2004). There has been many developments in the healthcare marketing in India like, online marketing, partnerships, branding and co-branding strategies, accreditation by JCI (Joint Commission International), telemedicine, corporate visits, and negotiations with the governments (Venkatesh, 2007).

The innovative marketing and promotional strategies have created unique experiences for patients. Facilities such as Aravind Eye Hospitals have impressed people worldwide, and have been the subject of study with a view to replicating their success in other hospitals. India has become a major destination for quality healthcare not only for neighbouring developing countries, but also for developed western countries (Jampani, 2006).
Some of the top hospitals have entered into alliances with hotel chains to offer better ‘medical tourism’ services. For example, Apollo Gleneagles has a tie-up with the Hyatt Regency to offer its foreign patients a comprehensive medical-cum-tourism package. Efforts are also underway to increase the number of beds, bring in the best of doctors with international experience, and adopt the latest in medical technology. In this regard, the Manipal Hospital has received the US Joint Commission International Accreditation despite having an ISO certification for fulfilling European quality standards.

The industry is also trying to establish certain operational standards. For instance, the healthcare companies that cater to medical tourism have commenced talks with credit rating agencies, insurance companies and the CII, among others for standardising various functions. The industry is also planning to introduce an external auditing and monitoring doctors’ performance to ensure the best services for the foreign medical tourists. With such a focused approach, and a huge market potential, medical tourism can bring good amount of foreign exchange.

The current efforts at hospitals in Bangalore are to institutionalise and re-route patients from expensive medical destinations to super-specialty hospitals here. Many hospitals have set up Information kiosks in various countries to showcase their services. These centers play a major role in assisting patients and provide an array of value added services. Assistance is available to find cost-effective accommodation in hotels, service apartments, tourism options for patient's attendants, including transport and translator services.

The value of global healthcare industry is three trillion USD. Both the Indian Government and the healthcare industry have recognised the foreign exchange potential of medical tourism. With focused marketing strategies it is possible for them to earn revenues in the form of tourism and foreign exchange.
3.3.1 Product Positioning Strategy

Positioning addresses the question “what does this hospital want to be known for”? As a healthcare provider, every hospital would be prepared to serve the immediate medical needs of every patient who arrives at admission (Sudhakar, 2003). Market positioning is the first step and is defined as the process of identifying and selecting markets or segments that represent business potential, to determine the criteria for competitive success (DiMingo, 1988). Consumers are regarded as kingpins in any business. Now, the healthcare industry has also put the consumers in charge of healthcare. Personalised medical technologies that enable treatments to be designed for individuals is a result of innovations happening in this industry. Creation of packages for consumers which are unique, made to order and enabling value for the consumers are to be regarded as the product positioning strategy (Herzlinger, 2002).

The successful positioning of tourism services is more difficult than that of physical goods. Because it is more difficult to promote abstract concepts such as experiences, benefits, or values than the tangible elements of physical goods such as size, color, or weight. These intangible elements of service, including staff competence, reputation, expertise, and skills form the basis for positioning of tourism products (Kandampully, Mok and sparks, 2008). Low cost, critical medical services available in India are encouraging people from abroad, to get treated here. Bangalore is gaining ground as a preferred destination for medical tourism (Chengappa, 2000).

Different hospitals adopt different positioning strategies to attract overseas patients. Overall, Bangalore is positioned as a medical hub. “Medical Value Travel” has become the new term for medical tourism. Foreign medical tourists coming to India seek a higher value for their money. This has made the hospitals to give the best value proposition to the foreign medical tourists (Ghoshal, 2007). Given a careful segmentation of medical tourists and a study of their needs, Indian health services can be positioned to cater to the different segments. In general health care services can be positioned along three dimensions: They are,
1. Holistic traditional Indian therapies added with tourism focus and

2. Mainstream medical treatment provided by private hospitals and

3. Offering mainstream medical treatment and traditional therapies as a package which needs to be positioned separately and communicated to different target audiences.

### 3.3.2 Marketing Mix for Medical Tourism

Modern management regards marketing and production as interdependent subsystems. Therefore, in marketing management, a number of problems are discussed, such as personal selling, advertisement, publicity, sales promotion, pricing, placement and the management of marketing people. Marketing mix can be defined as the combination of marketing controls used to market a product or a service. In addition, marketing management is also responsible for the continual adjustment of marketing controls used to market tangibles or intangibles (Rathwell, 1994).

### Product Mix

A product is anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, or use of consumption that might satisfy a want or need. It includes physical objects, services, persons, places, organizations and ideas (Kotler, 1983). Here, it refers to a healthcare package designed to fulfill the customer requirements. These packages include a detailed description of the services and facilities offered by the healthcare organizations.

The health services for the foreign medical tourist can be grouped as follows:

- Preventive Treatment: Health Education, Counseling, Exercises
- Rejuvenative Treatment: Yoga, Meditation, SPA’s.
Cosmetic Treatment: Cosmetic Dentistry, Specialized plastic surgeries for physical attraction.

Curative Treatment: Cardiac, Orthopaedic, Organ transplant, fertility, ophthalmic, Dental etc.

A combination of modern and traditional treatments: A package exclusively designed for foreign medical tourists which combines a modern cosmetic or curative treatment in a super speciality hospital combined with rejuvenation or preventive treatments in spas. It can also be a rejuvenation therapy at a spa coupled with touristic options in the state.

**Price Mix:**

Price is the most significant motivator attracting foreign medical tourists to Indian hospitals. Price mix has to be carefully derived to suit the purchasing power of the target customers. Differential pricing strategy is most widely practiced, which allows health organizations to adopt prices as per individual customer, type of product, place, time and duration of consumption. Some healthcare organizations also practice premium pricing which aim at upper class customers and for preventive and rejuvenation therapies in spas (Jain, 2005). Standard pricing for a bundle of services in the form of a package is found to be very effective in health check – up and rejuvenation services. Price negotiations and corporate discounts are also common practices while dealing with the institutional customers.

**Place Mix:**

As the medical tourism services are coupled with tourism, the destination or place of service delivery assumes great importance. The modern super speciality hospitals are located in metropolitan cities or state capitals to facilitate easy accessibility. Spas, naturopathy, yoga and meditation centers are usually located away from the cities in a natural surrounding, at the banks of the river, sea shores, hills. This helps the patients to move away from the heat and dust of cities to the freshness of nature. So, a good
place mix combining both modern and traditional therapies play a major motivator attracting foreign medical tourists.

**Promotion Mix:**

Healthcare organizations are using sophisticated modern marketing tools for the promotion of their service for informing, image building, differentiating, involving and attracting potential customers. However, internet is considered the most significant promotion tool to attract foreign medical tourists. Hospital websites updated with testimonials of satisfied patients, facility for on line consultation acts as a promotion tool. Other than this, premium lifestyle, travel, health, and in flight magazines and special newspaper supplements are commonly used to attract health travelers. Advertisements telecasted in related programmes on television channels such as discovery, Travel and living TV shows allow the marketers to reach a large number of target audience. Participation of hospitals in international medical tourism exhibitions, the endorsement of celebrities in different medias about their experience of treatment are some promotional mix elements extensively used by healthcare organizations.

**People Mix:**

People mix is one of the most important marketing mix elements in the medical tourism process. Efficiency of doctors, nurses, technicians, para-medical staff, their attitude towards the patients, serve as an attraction for the foreign medical tourists. In the case of Karnataka, the English speaking populace in and out of the hospitals, hospitality, doctors who are trained abroad, availability of translators have a high degree of acceptability for the global medical tourists. Further, the tourism punch line of India as “athithi devo bhavah” which focus on the importance given to hospitality and treating the guests like God impress the foreign medical tourists. “Service with a smile” is another strategy which is continuously given due importance across healthcare organizations.
Process Mix:

In Medical Tourism, service creation and delivery process is a very important issue. A clear information for the foreign medical tourist about the treatment, air journey, insurance, duration of stay, value added services, method of delivery of services have to be provided. This process should reach customer’s expectations and should be effectively communicated to the patient starting from “inquiry generation” stage to “discharge”. Further, confidentialities, flexibilities, guarantees offered by the healthcare organization to the patient help it to create a personalised medical service. Actual “service encounter” takes place once the treatment starts. So, hospitals have to consider process mix as the most important marketing mix element. Ultimately, the customer delight depends on the nature of service received.

Physical Evidence Mix:

The quality and appearance of the infrastructural facilities in the healthcare organizations, equipments, technology, and furniture are very important for foreign medical tourists. It will instill confidence among customers. Effective management of this creates a pleasurable and memorable healthcare experience. This is why the hospitals which are into medical tourism are giving importance to ambience inside the hospital, uniform dress codes which guides and impress the patients to distinguish the hospital staff easily. One such strategy is clearly visible in Columbia-Asia hospital in Hebbal, Bangalore. Doctor and his team take utmost care to make the intangible service tangible by adding physical evidence.

This makes the whole team look professional and instill confidence in the minds of foreign medical tourists. This also includes, the kind of furniture used, wall paintings and overall interior decoration done at the hospital. Ayurvedagram, Soukya Spa, Jindal Naturopathy Centre, Angsana Spa , Indus Valley Ayurvedic center, Mysore have created a complete natural environment for the patients. Starting from the entrance, these spas are full of greenery. The touch of Kerala is given in Ayurvedagram wherein they have used the kathakkali terracotta statues, boats,
swimming pools give the coastal look. One cannot feel that Ayurvedagram is in a metropolitan city like Bangalore. At Soukya Spa, the yoga hall attracts the attention. Holistic treatment which is the unique selling proposition of Soukya is physically evident with the architecture, natural ambience, staff attitude and hospitality towards the guests.

**The Ss Model of Healthcare Service Marketing:**

The P’s of marketing mix are to be converted into S’s of marketing in the context of successful marketing of healthcare services. They are, Standards (quality), Smile, Simplify, Speed, Solutions, Security, Synergy, Stretch (continuous improvement), Special, etc. (Cheng, 2005). These dimensions can be very effective in marketing medical tourism as they focus on all the potential benefits of flying to a different country for a medical treatment. They speak about the differential marketing mix elements which have to be used to position a service like, medical tourism. Zeithmal and Parasuraman model of SERVQUAL dimensions like, responsiveness, empathy, reliability, tangibility have also got huge implications for the medical tourism product.

**3.3.3 Branding of medical tourism**

A product is something that is made, in a factory. Whereas, a brand is something that is bought by a customer. A product can be copied by a competitor but, a brand is unique. A product can be quickly outdated: a successful brand is timeless (King, 1973). It underlines the statement that brand is eternal. Brand is a promise that must be kept (Levy, 1997). Centuries ago, branding evolved as a concept of ownership and identification. Later, branding was adopted by craftsmen, who wished to be identified as the source of their products. Thus, in ancient times, marks of potters emerged and in medieval time, marks of printers and various other craft guilds followed (Keller, 2003). However, the fertile branding environment emerged during the second part of the 18th century and the beginning of 19th century (Low and Fullerton, 1994). A brand is a claim of distinction. A claim of distinction helps a brand stand out the clutter and provides the customer a clear reason to choose the brand over the
competitor’s offerings. Brand building is a costly exercise and every individual throughout the organization needs to be on board in an exercise to create a strong brand. Brand can be defined as “everything that an organization or any individual does in an organization” (Upadhyaya, Soni, 2006).

The objective of branding India is to produce a unique and attractive offering that meets both the rational and emotional needs of the tourists. Recent Indian success in attracting international tourists is largely due to the promotional campaign, “Incredible India” (Kant A, 2004). The same campaign is effectively used to brand India as a destination for medical tourism. Thailand, for instance, has just one world-class hospital, and they are already hot as medical tourism destination. Singapore too has seen this opportunity early and their public health system is being accessed by medical tourists from many countries. Australia has also set up a huge healthcare infrastructure for health tourism or medical tourism. The Indian Health Care Federation is now working along with different industry chambers to promote medical tourism in the country.

Hankinson (2003) provides a framework for a relationship network brand. He proposes that the pull of destination brand is dependent on its image which in turn is dependent on four key dimensions. These dimensions are:

1. Destination brands as perpetual entities
2. Destination brands as communicators
3. Destination brands as relationships
4. Destination brands as value enhancers

The model proposed by Hankinson, provides a useful framework along which India can be branded as a medical tourist destination. Strategic alliances, collective lobbying, alliance with foreign insurance players, airlines, and tour operators, NHS, and foreign doctors on a revenue sharing basis would increase in medical tourists. An
industry wide initiative involving CII, FICCI and private players to showcase the quality standards of medical care and the cultural heritage of India worldwide are needed to be undertaken.

Ms. Renuka Chowdhury, the former Union Tourism Minister has advocated a step in this direction. That is, to provide branding not only for health tourists, but also for the medical institutions who are the major players in it. She further stressed the need to combine health care with tourism. It is a two-pronged strategy to step up not merely tourism but also the health facilities and expertise India has built up over decades. India is branded for much lower cost of treatment, especially surgery, than in Europe and the United States. In addition to the main stream medical treatments, there are businesspersons who opt for a thorough medical check up, combining it with business or vacation plans in the region. It is here that, traditional Indian therapies like, Ayurveda can be attached. A stage has come where some Indian corporate hospitals have spread their wings, setting up branches in neighbouring countries. If government of India get into the act and begin to market the country's health tourism potential — including, with due verification and care, indigenous Indian systems of medicine — there will be several multiplier effects.

Another important step under branding India for medical tourism is to accredit hospitals in a professional way for health tourism. This critical task cannot be left to just the Health and Tourism Ministries. It calls for meticulous professional assessment of facilities and a grading of hospitals. A transparent system of well defined norms have to be used to benchmark the hospitals on the basis of visible infrastructure, expertise, and facilities. Accreditation of the hospital by JCI plays a major role in instilling confidence to foreign medical tourists. States such as Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka, which have demonstrated health tourism potential. They are involving themselves wholeheartedly in the effort to promote India’s status and image as a medical hub in Asia.
3.4 Co–branding of Medical Tourism with Traditional Indian Therapies

There are two schools of thought in this regard. The first views traditional systems as based on fundamentally different assumptions about human life, health and illness, which does not reconcile with the theories of bio-medicine. Traditional medicines attempt to restore the balance of mind, body and soul, and treat patients holistically. The medical approach, on the other hand, treats a patient as a passive organism and focuses only on bodily aspects of the health problem (Dalal, 2005). These fundamental differences are reflected in the differences in the formulation of the theories pertaining to cause of diseases, drug action, dietetics, etc. (Shankar, 1992). The second school, on the other hand, sees many possibilities of developing a unified healthcare delivery system. Their emphasis is on a creative synthesis between these two systems to develop a new Indian model of healthcare. There are many possibilities of co-branding and the examples from Asian countries like, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore has to be considered (Dalal, 2005).

Innovative partnerships and promotions can be very effective in promoting medical tourism in Karnataka. The idea is to create a co-brand of medical tourism with other traditional Indian therapies. This partnership can create the synergy and provide a unique selling proposition for medical tourism in Karnataka. Medical tourism has to offer a business and a value proposition. Many developing countries are in a position to offer medical services at one-tenth the cost compared to that in many countries in the West, matching the quality at par with developed countries thus creating an opportunity in cost-effective treatment and medical-tourism.

India has an opportunity that is unique as it offers holistic medicinal service. With yoga, meditation, ayurveda, allopathy, and other medical treatments, they offer a unique blend of services to an individual that will be difficult to match by other countries.
Graph 3.1: A Model of Co-branding of medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies

It is clear from the above model that, the medical tourism product in the state can offer multiple solutions to a foreign medical tourist. It can be customized according to the requirement of the patients in order to provide the quality service.

Co – branding of medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies can also be termed as Jugalbandhi of Ayurveda with Allopathy. It can be regarded as a one – stop – shop available for patients to avail complex surgeries and rehabilitations (Sharma, 2007). Ayurveda and allopathy - the two systems of medicine were considered entirely different and were not used complementary to one another earlier. But now, India is witnessing a collaboration of Ayurveda and Allopathy which holds strategic advantage for India in general and Karnataka in particular for medical tourism. Ayurvedic wellness centres — also known as holistic health centres — and hospitals are now having tie-ups for providing pre and post-treatment services to patients. While some wellness centres are establishing their setup at hospitals, others are comfortable providing services to hospitals from their centres.
Such tie-ups have helped combine traditional healthcare knowledge and practices with the conventional system to make a complete healthcare setup under one roof. Every system has its own merits and limitations. The idea is to combine all the merits of each system to give maximum benefit and cure to patients (KAPL, 2010). According to Dr. Issac Mathai, who owns and manages Soukya, a holistic centre in Bangalore, patients referred by various hospitals are healed at their centre, which also reduces the average length of stay at the hospital. Soukya has a team of doctors qualified in Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Naturopathy and Allopathy. They currently receive patients from Manipal Hospital, Hosmat Hospital, MS Ramaiah Hospital and NIMHANS.

Such tie-ups are mutually beneficial for both the modern super speciality hospitals and wellness centres. For the wellness centres providing traditional Indian therapies, modern super speciality hospitals can provide treatments for patients having critical ailments and who also need life-saving support of the modern medical technology. These tie-ups are also necessary for creating evidence-based documentation on the efficacy of Ayurvedic treatment using modern technologies and parameters. For the super speciality hospitals, a tie up with wellness centres can reduce the patient’s stay at the hospital and provide recuperation after the surgery by giving holistic and unique treatments. When the patients are done with their surgeries, the hospitals refer them to wellness centres with which they have a tie-up. This applies also to patients who visit wellness centres first. Many patients coming to wellness centres come mainly for joint pain, stiffness of joints, arthritis, back pain etc. But sometimes the patient arrives when the problem has aggravated and needs immediate surgical intervention. They can depend on each other with co – branding for space, infrastructure, promotional support and marketing. To have a successful collaboration, both sides need to have an understanding in terms of the treatments offered - the quality, the authenticity and the effectiveness, besides the costs that may be involved.

Wellness centres are mainly targeting hospitals with super specialities. In Ayurvedic spas, treatments are customized according to the specialisation. If a hospital specialises in cardiac surgeries, they provide post-surgery treatments for heart
ailments. The hospitals look out for centres who have a scientific approach and who can accommodate the ideas of Allopathy. The concept of co – branding can be further emphasized with the fact that at Ayurvedic spas, physicians with an integrated Ayurveda degree, which includes certain sections of Allopathy are required because, there is no concept of in-patients in Ayurveda, a fully-dedicated centre for them is not required at the hospital.

Hospitals by collaborating contribute their medical expertise and the latest technology in medical care. Wellness centres are able to send their patients to well-equipped hospitals for severe cases of illness. Also, the collaboration between wellness centres and hospitals is likely to give medical tourism a fillip, as people come to India to undergo surgeries and then recuperate with Ayurvedic treatments. Such tie-ups will definitely ease the treatment and rehabilitation process for foreigners, resulting in their increased satisfaction. Due to these collaborations, the pace of recovery is much faster, and will increase patient flow to Bangalore.

Co - branding of medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies through tie – ups has to be done with mutual discussions and clarifications with respect to the patient’s problem, the treatment undergone, proper follow – ups etc. Ayurveda and Allopathy come from different school of thoughts. Hence, both fields need to work in collaboration to provide the best services to patients.

The concept of co – branding of medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies is still in its nascent stage. But, it is on the road to become more popular. If it is promoted by the marketing team of both the players globally, best value can be delivered to the foreign medical tourists. There is a need for a modern approach to patient care and to change the traditional mindsets of doctors of both the fields. Both need to understand each other’s language to succeed. Although right now, only around 10 per cent of the hospitals and centres have tie-ups, there is no doubt that this concept will be widely accepted in times to come.
3.5 Prospects of growth by co – branding medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies

Although a collaboration of both sections of medicine is not that easy for professionals on either side, this has positive effects. Many patients come from overseas for Ayurvedic treatment at Bangalore as the healthcare facilities and the climate provide an excellent platform for patients to seek both Ayurvedic and medical treatment. Similarly, the foreign medical tourists coming exclusively for modern surgery may take up a rejuvenation therapy at a spa as it is available as a package.

Some of the major benefits of co – branding of medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies can be summarized as below:

a. **It creates synergy:** A systematic co – branding of medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies can bring additional benefits to both super speciality hospitals and spas. Because, foreign medical tourists contacting either of them might end up choosing a package covering both the treatments. It can be a win –win situation for both modern hospitals and spas providing traditional therapies.

b. **Easy positioning of the product:** As Karnataka has become popular for both the systems of medicine, positioning it as a destination unmatched with any other competitor can result in increased flow of foreign medical tourists. It becomes easy for the healthcare organizations to find a place in the minds of consumers by co – branding together.

c. **Mutually beneficial:** Co – branding of medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies can act as a one – stop shop for medical tourist to avail complex surgeries and rejuvenations. Tourism boards can also be benefited by tie – ups with the healthcare organizations in creating packages for the patient’s attendants and in some cases for the foreign medical tourists as well.
d. **USP of Karnataka:** Co – branding of both the systems of medicine is Karnataka’s Unique Selling Proposition in the medical tourism industry. Karnataka is facing tough competition in the field of medical tourism. As availability of both modern and traditional therapies is the unique selling proposition of Karnataka, this can act as a major motivator as the competitors cannot offer it.

e. **Attracts tourists for the special value it creates:** For the foreign medical tourists, it is like a one stop shop for their treatments. Further, they can catch two birds with one arrow by choosing a package done by co – branding which results in increased satisfaction. These are the value additions which can be provided with the healthcare services. It can make the foreign medical tourist to receive “customer delight”.

f. **Enhances brand image:** Karnataka has already become a brand in the world medical tourism industry and it can be further enhanced by co - branding.

g. **Provides effective marketing and promotional strategy:** As this is a new marketing strategy, it can be effectively used in the process of international marketing of medical tourism.

h. **Speeds up the recovery process:** Ayurveda has some exclusive therapies for recuperation after a surgery. As the foreign medical tourists have to stay for at least fifteen days to one month, they can come out of the hospital environment, go to a spa which is real and natural. It helps them to be in touch with the surgeon as well. Yoga, meditation, naturopathy, ayurveda have specific treatments post surgery. For the foreign medical tourist undergoing a complex modern surgery, recuperation at a spa can make him recover soon with the special treatments available.
Hospitals by collaborating contribute their medical expertise and the latest technology in medical care, the collaboration between wellness centres and hospitals is likely to give medical tourism a fillip, as people come to India to undergo surgeries and then recuperate with Ayurvedic treatments. Such tie-ups will definitely ease the treatment and rehabilitation process for foreigners, resulting in their increased satisfaction.
3.6 Co – branding medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies- Promotional Strategies

David Ogilvy, the father of modern advertising stated, "Any damn fool can put up a deal, but it takes genius, faith and perseverance to create a brand."

Karnataka, with its unusual offer of a mix of traditional systems like ayurveda, yoga and modern medical expertise, has uniquely poised to capture the health tourism market that currently thrives in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. It has the highest number of approved health systems and alternative therapies. The department has done limited promotion campaigns in the country and in the Gulf, Pakistan and the UK to highlight what it can offer. After being called as the Silicon City, now the state capital is ready to be called as “health city”. According to Mr. Mahendra Jain, Ex State Tourism Commissioner, Karnataka is receiving 20 per cent of the 3.2 lakh total international inflow as healthcare tourists. He further adds that the state has to be positioned as an ideal health tourism destination with its best hospitals and tourism spots.

Every brand has some associations to it. It has the attributes like latest technologies, friendly attitude, honesty, promptness, focus on one super speciality, heritage and culture of service. If one is clear about the associations needed to create the brand, they need to consider the ways in which these associations will be manifested. Co – branding is another such association which can create the synergy which is mutually beneficial.

However, for a successful programme of co-branding of medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies, following linkages are needed. They are,

a. Specialist doctors and surgeries: For medical treatments in general and medical tourism in particular, specialist doctors and surgeries act as a major
factor for patients to choose a hospital for treatment. Doctors in most of the super speciality hospitals are known for their efficiency and most of them even have medical degrees from foreign universities. Most of them also have contacts with hospitals abroad which help a hospital in Karnataka to call them here for treatment.

b. Travel agents: They act as a link between a foreign medical tourist and a hospital and spa in India. They guide the foreign medical tourist to choose a hospital, package, make negotiations, etc. They play a major role in international marketing of medical tourism with regard to many hospitals in Karnataka.

c. Hotels: As majority of foreign medical tourists seek best of the lodging facilities, after the surgery or treatment, a collaboration of the hospitals with a five star hotel is essential.

d. Banks: Banks are of major help for the foreign medical tourist in making payments, foreign exchange conversion.

e. Tourism Boards: Tourism boards in association with the hospitals can help the hospitals in creating the packages for the foreign medical tourists. Department of Tourism, Karnataka has been promoting medical tourism with the help of packages and by assisting in their promotional programmes.

f. Diagnostic centres: Whether it is modern treatment or traditional one, initial diagnosis is essential. Hence, they are regarded as a major linkage in the medical tourism co-branding process.

g. Spas: For most of the foreign medical tourists, spas providing preventive and rejuvenative therapies is an attraction. This acts as a unique selling proposition for a foreign medical tourist to seek treatment in Karnataka.

h. Health insurance companies abroad: As most of the foreign medical tourists might have their medical insurance, a deal with them can increase their flow to the state.

The super speciality hospitals can reflect the rich culture of service of the wellness centres providing traditional Indian therapies and vice versa. The hand-made portraits, old pictures, old written testimonials framed and hung on the walls can help to create the holistic brand of the state for medical tourism.
Some other strategies that can be used by these healthcare organizations in Karnataka include:

- The hospitals and wellness centres together can organize some events like, symposiums, seminars, health tourism expos where the theme of co-branding of both the systems of medicines can be exposed to the target audience.
- The theme of co-branding of medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies has to be communicated to the target market in all press releases and communications. Television, print media and internet can be used to promote the concept.
- Managing Contact Points is very important in the context of co-branding medical tourism with traditional Indian therapies. All the major players in the task of co-branding like, hospitals, wellness spas, government, agents for medical tourism have to work in collaboration for the common interests.
- Other contact points where the customers come to experience the brand also need to be identified and managed.
- Physical appearance of the building, both exterior and interior, needs to be thought of. Brochures, website, letterheads, visiting cards, patient files and other documents have to be carefully designed. It will work to have a uniform basic design with uniform colour schemes for everything related to the hospital.
- It is a well-known fact that brand loyalty is very important for any business. In case of hospitals, it is all the more important. The reason for brand loyalty being of prime importance is that hospitals are at a 'high-risk' purchase decision for the customers. Any customer who will buy the hospital's services for the first time is likely to ask about it to a few of his friends. Therefore, the best value has to be delivered to the foreign medical tourist who can later act as the brand ambassador for the hospital and is the most vocal spokesperson of your brand in his community.
- Good news with 'high involvement' services is that the brand loyalty for them is very strong. Therefore, the hospitals and spas treating the foreign medical tourists must take utmost care to delight the customers.
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM) programmes can also be helpful in the context of co-branding medical tourism with traditional Indian
therapies. This is because, with a basket of different packages available, the foreign medical tourist may try to visit Karnataka for another treatment for himself or might promote the same to his friends and relatives.

The stakeholders in the medical tourism process can popularize and market it to the foreign medical tourists through co–branding. The time and money spent by hospitals in their brand building exercise can bring a long-term competitive advantage. It can create the core competency for the state of Karnataka in the medical tourism front.

### 3.7 Advertising media used for promoting medical tourism

A variety of advertising media is used for promoting medical tourism internationally. However, the one used most extensively by almost all the major players is, internet. The hospital website provides all the needed information for the foreign medical tourists regarding various treatments in India. Further, there are opportunities like, video conferencing wherein the patients can directly indulge in discussions with the doctors in India and clarify their doubts. With the help of social networking websites like, orkut, facebook, linked-in, ryze, medical tourism is advertised. Travel agents through their websites and contacts give the international market presence for their clients.

Some of the international television channels like Travel and Living, telecast the stories of foreign nationals undergoing complicated surgery in the country are frequently featured in media. Those who come for treatment to India are not only from other developing countries, but also from UK, Europe, and North America (Ananthakrishnan, 2006). This acts as the testimonial for foreign medical tourist seeking to undergo treatments in India. The role on international travel and tourism agents in promoting medical tourism is valued highly by some of the hospitals. They act as mediators between the foreign medical tourists and the hospitals thereby marketing and providing the essential medical tourism services to the clients. They play a major role in creating the customized packages for the foreign medical tourists.
In the healthcare industry, the expertise of the doctors play a major role in creating the confidence among the patients. Some of the doctors in the major hospitals in Karnataka have contacts with the hospitals and doctors abroad and they get the patients referred to their hospital in India. Further, articles related to medical tourism in India published in the travel and tourism magazines, healthcare journals, case studies, in flight magazines, brochures of department of tourism play a major role in advertising medical tourism.

International medical tourism expos arranged by the government, provides an opportunity for the hospitals to come and participate and showcase the facilities available with them to the international audience. This is effectively used by hospitals like, Narayana Hrudayalaya, Manipal Hospital, Hosmat Hospital, etc. Even the Government of India’s tourism campaign of “Incredible India”, Government of Karnataka’s slogan of “One State, Many Worlds”, are playing a major role in boosting the tourism image of Indian medical tourism industry. The most effective communication means for the tourism industry is word of mouth. Since experiencing and assessing the tourism product is impossible before its purchase, potential tourists ask and rely on advice from friends and relatives (Bateson, 1995). In order to capitalize on this, the best quality service leading to consumer delight has to be provided to the foreign medical tourists.
3.8 Scope for Medical Tourism in coastal and malnad regions of Karnataka.

“Malnad”, in Kannada means, “land of hills”. The name itself describes the nature of this region. It can boast of rich, dense and evergreen forests with numerous species of flora and fauna. Soothing weather with average temperature throughout the year is its speciality. This region has got many things to offer to a foreign medical tourist. Malnad districts of Shimoga, Hassan, Chickmagalore have dense flora and fauna. Udupi, South Canara, Coorg and North Canara districts of Karnataka are covered by long coastal line, endowed with beaches, water falls giving exotic tourist experience.

These districts have high potential to attract a class of foreign tourists. This is not promoted and exploited by the department of tourism. If medical tourism is combined with recuperation and rejuvenation in these areas for the foreign medical tourist, the result is unique for the foreign medical tourist. As Karnataka is endowed with a combination of high – tech super - speciality hospitals on the one hand, on the other, it has a number of natural beauty spots .The Malnad districts like, Shimoga, Chickmagalore, Coorg, and Hassan can provide something unique to the tourists.

Malnad region can offer a variety of tourism options. First of all, agro – tourism can be targeted to tourists as this region is known for unique crops like, arecanut plantations, coffee, tea and cardamom estates. It can also be a centre for adventure tourism. The dense Sahyadri evergreen forest is a centre for varieties of flora and fauna. Trekking in this area will be a great experience. Further, Eco – Tourism can be offered as everything is “natural to the core”. If it has to be offered in Bangalore, this ambience has to be created artificially. But, Malnad region has in built facilities for tourism which has to be exploited.

Agriculture is the key occupation in Malnad areas. Seasonality is one of the problems associated with the crops grown in this area. Further, in recent years, the agriculturists in these areas are suffering because of the falling prices of their products like
arecanuts, Cocoa, Vanilla, Coffee, etc. They are in search of a “business plan” which can bring back the smile on their faces. One such programme can be Medical Tourism with “home stay” concept or “Ayurvedic spa” which can offer varieties of treatments in a natural location.

The adoption of Kerala model of tourism can be very effective for Medical Tourism in Malnad region. Arrangement of a place to stay in a cottage in this area itself will be an “enjoyment”. If this is coupled with Ayurvedic treatments like, Panchakarma, Shirodhara, Katibasti, which is performed by a qualified Ayurvedic doctor, the medical tourist can be delighted. For Indians themselves, this region is like “heaven” which is devoid of all sorts of pollution, traffic congestions, business and career related tensions, etc. For a foreign medical tourist, this can turn out to be “worth their money, having travelled all the way from their respective countries”.

Though it might not be applicable to all kinds of foreign medical tourists, for those who have undergone simple cosmetic surgery, preventive and ayurvedic treatments may be beneficial. Kerala model of home-stays and cottages can deliver a high value for the foreign medical tourists. It can create a package by combining eco tourism, agro tourism, health tourism, adventure tourism which cannot be provided in Bangalore.

Hence, there is a need for the co ordination among the department of tourism, travel agents and local residents in these areas. Hospitals have to plan and create a package for foreign medical tourists. This can be beneficial for all the players mentioned above. This can provide an additional income opportunity for the interested players in these areas on the one hand and can promote tourism on the other hand.

Cultural heritage is another significant feature of this region. The regions of Malnad and Coastal areas are known for scenic beauty. The districts of Shimoga, Chickmagalure, North Canara, Hassan have a high potential to attract a class of foreign tourists. This is not promoted and exploited by the department of tourism. If
medical tourism is combined with recuperation and rejuvenation in these areas for the foreign medical tourist, the result is unique for the foreign medical tourist.

Rural tourism is another touristic option which can be provided to the foreign medical tourists. Villages in the malnad and coastal areas have a unique lifestyle. It is very near to nature. This is an untapped potential of Karnataka tourism. This can be specially targeted to those foreigners visiting Karnataka for preventive and rejuvenation therapies. Home-stay concept can also be used where in, people in this region can be tied up in this business. It can be an additional source of income for them.

3.9 Conclusion

India in general and the state of Karnataka in particular is facing a tough competition from countries like, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia in the medical tourism front. Hence, innovative marketing strategies have to be applied by the healthcare organizations to promote medical tourism. Therefore, making a judicious marketing mix keeping in mind the foreign medical tourists and offering the proposed value has become their priority. Further, market segmentation based on the nationality and the treatment sought by the foreign medical tourist, product positioning strategies to attract different target groups is necessary.

Karnataka has a unique potential of providing both modern treatments and traditional therapies. Co – branding between modern hospitals and spas can create a synergy for both the players. The super speciality hospitals and ayurvedic spas have in Karnataka have already branded themselves focusing on their core competencies. Some hospitals like, Sagar hospital, Narayana Hrudyalaya have already banked upon the potential of Co – branding themselves with Ayurvedagram and Soukya Spa which provide traditional therapies. This strategy can be very beneficial for Karnataka to have a unique place in the medical tourism map.
Foreigners coming to Karnataka for various treatments is not new. They have been coming to the country for decades now to experience yoga, Ayurveda and spirituality. But, the number of medical tourists coming to the state seeking critical medical care such as heart surgery, organ transplant, knee or hip replacement, or even something as simple as a root canal treatment is continuously increasing. Most of the medical tourists end up going to these hospitals, simply because these are the ones that have invested in state-of-the-art medical equipment, modern buildings, and world-class systems and practices, besides employing doctors having rich experience and most of them with foreign university degrees, and most of whom have worked abroad.