

SEEKING TREATMENT: Choosing between going abroad or availing local healthcare facilities

Every year, thousands of Bangladeshi patients travel abroad in search of better medical treatment despite the availability of similar services within the country. The reasons for this trend range from a lack of trust in the local healthcare system to a desire for more advanced medical facilities. Let us take a look at why patients usually prefer to receive treatment from outside the country, and what can our local medical healthcare industry do to reverse this trend.

Why do patients choose foreign hospitals?

"I was diagnosed with a complicated thyroid disease, so I decided to go to Mount Elizabeth Hospital in Singapore and receive surgery there, just to be safe as I have had relatives who had bad experiences from hospitals here when it came to difficult surgeries. Since then, I have been going there every year for my regular check-up, as the facilities and treatment are top-notch." — Sonia Ahmed

Indeed, for preferring treatment abroad, the main cause seems to be better services from foreign hospitals. A 2021 report from the Times of India states that over half of all medical tourists in India are from Bangladesh. Data from India's tourism ministry indicates that the number of Bangladeshi patients seeking medical treatment in India has risen by 83 per cent in the last three years.

Factors including unprofessional behaviour from healthcare professionals, misdiagnosis, lack of clear explanations of health conditions, and the tendency of doctors to recommend unnecessary tests and drugs play a key role in patients going abroad. Another major factor that plays a role in this trend is the cost of treatment. Many patients feel that the cost of medical treatment in Bangladesh is higher compared to other countries. As a result, a large number of patients flock to India for its relatively affordable excellent facilities.

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