

Sunny Times Ahead

The healthcare market in Goa is undergoing a metamorphosis with more specialties being introduced and major hospitals slated for expansion, finds out
Rita Dutta.

In spite of being India's most popular tourist state, and flaunting one of the highest per capita incomes in the country, medical facility in Goa leaves much to be desired. And hence at times, of the 13.7 lakh population of Goa, one will often find most of them seeking medical help outside the state, sometimes traveling as far as Belgaum, Bangalore or Mumbai.



With a high rate of patients reporting in with cardiac pain and cancer, most hospitals in Goa focus mainly on these two specialities. The state reports 70 cancer cases for every one lakh people— higher than the national average of 50. A survey by the Goa Medical College shows that Goan women face a bigger risk of breast cancer, almost 35 cases for every one lakh, which is higher than the four metros. The high incidence can be attributed to women in this high literacy state, marrying late and delay in bearing children, thus increasing the risk of breast cancer; while the high rate of colon cancer among men could be ascribed to the regular consumption of red meat and alcohol.

Even as cardiology and oncology facilities are still being developed, aesthetic dentistry and plastic surgery are flourishing, thanks to high volume of foreign tourists. Around 50 to 100 patients troop to Goa every month for plastic surgery due to medical tourism, say analysts. For instance, in Apollo Victor Hospital, of 186 medical tourism patients who came last year for cosmetic, Orthopaedics and maxio-facial surgeries, over 70 per cent queued for cosmetic. Explaining the rationale behind the huge volume for cosmetic surgery, Biju Martins, CEO, Apollo Victor Hospital, says, "Cosmetic work is not covered in insurance and hence getting it done from a private doctor turns out to be expensive. That's why Westerners prefer to come to Goa, where we do it at half the cost."

Seeking the Next Step

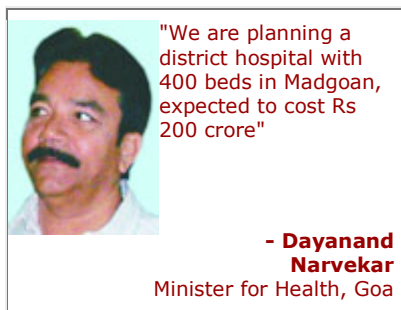
While Goa Medical Hospital in Bamboulim and Hospicio in Madgaon are considered state-of-the-art, medical oncology is available only at Manipal Goa Hospital. Most centres do not provide radiation oncology and chemotherapy. Nor is haemato-oncology available at any hospital. Cardiology facilities are far from satisfactory, and invasive cardiology and CABG are conducted only at Apollo Victor Hospital. "Electro-physiology test and radio-frequency ablation are unheard of in cardiology here," says Physician Oscar Rebello.

Most surgeries are not performed laparoscopically. There is no department of endocrinology or genetics in any of the hospitals and when it comes to nephrology, it is surprising to know that the state has not performed any kidney transplantation till date. Vrundavan Hospital is the only institute in Goa to offer dialysis facility, besides managing the dialysis centre at Apollo Victor Hospital.

Dr S Nayak, Executive Director, Voluntary Health Association of Goa (VHAG), says, "Even as psychiatric diseases are on the rise, there is only one mental hospital – the Institute of Psychiatry and Human Behaviour in Panjim, which is under-staffed. There are even cases of malnutrition among children coming in, mainly from among the migrants, with one in every third baby succumbing to it."

According to Dr Vikram Patel of Sangath Centre, Goa, "Depression and anxiety is the most common illness affecting locals; about six per cent of women in the community suffer from this disorder. The rates of depression and anxiety are higher amongst primary care attenders where 1 in 10 or more patients suffer from these disorders."

Good Spots, bad Spots



Except Manipal and Apollo, major hospital groups prefer to stay away from investing in this tourist state. It was not fruitful earlier to set up a state-of-the-art hospital here. "Most of times, patient prefer going to the GPs and family physicians than the hospital directly," says Dr Bharat Shah, GM, Salgaocar Medical Research Centre (SMRC). The population distribution vis-à-vis available and expanding infrastructure delays the breakeven. Positioning of a state-of-the-art healthcare facility to cater to only local or state clientele and surviving is a challenge. The

well-established public healthcare system has also dissuaded private parties from entering the state. "Even rich people prefer to avail of public healthcare facilities, which are free for the locals. From Rs 65 crore, we have upped the budget to Rs 100 crore for this financial year," says Dayanand Narvekar, Minister for Health, Goa. As of now, the major healthcare provider in Goa is the Government of Goa, through their medical college hospital (GMC), district hospitals and PHCs.

Winds of Change

The dark clouds of ill-equipped healthcare will dispel soon as both the public and private healthcare system is poised for a boom in terms of additions of beds and specialities.

Besides committing free treatment at public health institutes, under the Universal Medical Scheme, Goans can seek treatment up to Rs 1.5 lakh from any other centre, provided the facility is not available at the public centres. Recently, the Government decided to offer free medicine to cancer and trauma patients treated at GMC. It gives free antiretroviral therapy (ART) drugs to AIDS patients, too

On the March

Goa may soon become the first state in the country to make HIV test mandatory prior to registering a marriage. In a major boost to homeopathic practice, the state recently announced homeopathic clinics across its 11 health centres.

Asia's oldest medical college, the Goa Medical College (GMC) Hospital near Bambolim beach, draws approximately 40,000 admissions and 13,000 operations are performed here each year. Earlier known as Escola Medico Cirurgica De Nova Goa, the 1,200-bed hospital will soon add 450 beds by April this year. "GMC would also have a 128-bed Yatri Niwas for relatives of patients, expected to cost around Rs 8 crore. To facilitate more students into the profession of nursing, the hospital will build a new hostel at a cost of Rs 12 crore. From the current 30 nurses, the new hospital will be able to accommodate 300," says Dr Rajan Kunkolienkar, Medical Superintendent, GMC. According to Narvekar, "We are planning a district hospital with 400 beds in Madgoan, expected to cost Rs 200 crore."

Recently, the State Government kick-started implementing the Goa HealthNET starting with the 21st Century Hospital Information Management System (HIMS) at GMC. According to Dr VN Jindal, Dean, GMC, "The HIMS will benefit patient administration, accounting modules, hospital management modules, clinical modules for lab management, blood bank management, radiology information systems, and Electronic Medical Record (EMR) modules." In association with Infotech Corporation of Goa and 21st Century Health Solutions Group, GMC has completed first phase of the project. Says Satish Kini, Chief Mentor, 21st Century Health Solutions Group, "The project will entail a comprehensive Goa HealthNET plan covering other Government medical institutes in Goa, two district hospitals, 36 rural and urban hospitals and 19 Primary Health Centres (PHCs) across Goa." GMC is also planning to have separate section for cardiology and cardiac surgery.

However, the future will see private healthcare market exceeding the public ones. From 45:55 ratio of private versus public, analysts forecast, that the market would be 30:70 in the next two years.

Why Go Goa?

The reason for the boom is multi-fold. To begin with, the population is growing rapidly and more people are settling in Goa. The setting up of two IT parks is also likely to attract more people. Besides existing hospitals expanding facilities, new entrants are also exploring the market. According to a buzz, Wockhardt Hospitals Group has been scouting for some projects, and Vivus Group is coming up with a cardiology hospital in Goa. Two new medical colleges (one by the Salgoankar's and another by Nashik-based Motiwala Group) are being added. Speciality-wise, plastic surgery, dentistry, ophthalmology, accident trauma, diabetes, cardiology, oncology, environmental and occupational diseases will see growth.

Faster, Higher, Stronger

To sustain the growth, experts point out the need for developing a pool of skilled manpower. Says Dr Digamber Naik, Owner of Vrundavan Hospital, "Most skilled doctors are non-Goans, as there is a shortage of skilled manpower." The entire state has only one nephrologist. "We need innovations like stereotactic surgery, Gamma Knife, and advanced radiation therapy in Goa," adds Dr Naik. More nurses are required. There are only four colleges of nursing — two public ones at Madgoan and Panjim, others run by Apollo Victor and Vrundavan Hospital.

The state also needs to set up a regulatory body. There is a lack of awareness about accreditation. So far, only Vrundavan Hospital and Apollo Victor Hospital have ISO certification. There is also a need to develop bio-medical waste management treatment plant. "There are no segregation of medical waste and autoclaves in hospitals," adds Dr Nayak of VHAG.

Even if IT forms the backbone of hospital administration, hospitals in Goa do not use IT as they find the investment disproportionate to profit margins. Manipal Goa Hospital uses telemedicine with the Group's flagship hospital in Bangalore and Wockhardt Hospitals has established telemedicine connectivity with GMC.

With tourism being a major revenue generator, experts see a potential for developing Goa as a medical tourism hub. "We have good hotels. We need to develop the health infrastructure in Goa and market it a little more aggressively," says Dr Naik. Having a common forum to promote the state as a medical tourism destination would go a long way in bringing the state on the global medical tourism map.

The entry of more hospitals will bring down the cost of providing good healthcare facilities, and eventually, resource sharing between the hospitals will be the order of the day. This will also save people the trouble of traveling outside for treatment.



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