

OPINION

Heal in India - the hits!

Is India ready to invite the world to 'Heal in India,' or should it choose to focus on working to empower the nation's healthcare ecosystem that continues to be crippled by its own shortcomings? **Sidharth Shankar**, M&A Partner, JSA, Advocates and Solicitors, explains in detail

The brand called 'India' has not only fuelled an adrenaline rush across the country, but also triggered several wordplays at a global level: from 'Made in India,' which mutated to 'Make in India,' to the recent 'Heal in India' initiative, that is a moot point for debate when it comes to the *Azaadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav*- 75 years' celebrations.

COVID-19 was one such missed heartbeat for the nation. The daunting challenges of the pandemic provided the right climate for India's healthcare infrastructures and powers to bond in creating a robust mechanism for discovering success secrets to secure its own future.

While India was lauded for setting a benchmark in respect of the reliability of its manufacturing capabilities for testing and successfully implementing vaccination at lightning speed, it could have utilised the rare experiences of the pandemic to brainstorm critical ideas first and then propel the cause of 'Heal in India' and 'Heal by India.' It was an experience of a lifetime for the world when it was plunged into a crisis where all capabilities were perforce stretched to a breaking point.

The 'Heal in India' announcement may have several pros and wins, but being alert to the cons is even more potent. Cognizance of the impact on the overall approach towards the Indian healthcare model is crucial. Here are some of the hits to be applauded.

A special visa category, AYUSH visa, is on the cards for those foreign nationals who choose to avail AYUSH therapies. This is part of the initiative to promote the brand AYUSH (the ancient medical systems Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and



The 'Heal in India' announcement may have several pros and wins, but being alert to the cons is even more potent. Cognizance of the impact on the overall approach towards the Indian healthcare model is crucial

Homeopathy). In order to facilitate seamless implementation and facilitation of the initiative, special desks with interpreters have been assigned across airports. A multi-lingual portal and simplified visa rules will ease the overall process to make optimal use of the initiative.

India is a medical tourism destination for the increasing number of citizens from 44

countries who regularly visit India for various healthcare services due to the affordable cost and high quality of traditional medicines. This trend has fuelled the revenue from the medical tourism market to \$6 billion in fiscal 2020, and is expected to reach \$13 billion by 2026.

The portal will also provide various treatment details, packages, systems, redressal and

feedback mechanisms. Patients can be tracked by way of a unique health ID as per the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) framework. Their respective service levels can also be assessed.

A slew of infrastructure augmentation is on the anvil across 37 hospitals in 12 states - Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Assam - one of the most predominant healthcare delivery states when it comes to medical tourism. The Ministries of Health, Tourism, AYUSH and Civil Aviation have partnered with the Ministry of External Affairs to boost medical travel. The Medical Value Travel Council is the nodal agency to oversee the overall execution.

The PPP powerhouse

The Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) have undoubtedly been the source of success for any form of healthcare model in India. The PPP model has proved its worth in closing the yawning performance gap between the hamstrung public healthcare systems and the frontline private healthcare players.

The pandemic triggered positive collaborations, catalysing the combination of public and private capacities across diagnostics, technology and the last-mile healthcare delivery. Needless to say, the highly powered start-up ecosystem injected its speed and vigil into the entire healthcare spectrum.

CoWin is the best example of the success of the PPP model, which has been making its mark for over a decade now, spurred by encouraging policy initiatives. The PPP appraisal committee, appraisals and approvals of projects, and transparent bidding

processes have been some enablers of India's astounding success as the largest aggregator of investments in the South Asia region in 2021, recording a 49 per cent growth in investments via the PPP routes.

Policy points

Over time, in the absence of encouragement from the government, healthcare, as a sector, has grown in answer to the nationwide demand. Secondly, the stellar doctors and healthcare professionals mushrooming out of India's healthcare education sector have made the country the Mecca for medical talent. While these education models may not be the best on the global scale, the worldwide demand for Indian doctors, as also other medical staff, is a given.

New winds are blowing through the country's health sector. The massive privatisation in healthcare with apparent regulatory indiscipline, which often accompanies the robust growth of any sector has led to competition between public and private healthcare policy experts. In addition, the government's outreach programmes for the masses, the restructuring of the CGHS rates, payments and delivery mechanisms, price control and intent to support universal healthcare are other factors that can drastically change the scenario.

Rx

Is India ready to invite the world to 'Heal in India,' or should it choose to focus on working to empower the nation's healthcare ecosystem that continues to be crippled by its own shortcomings? It is time to be alert to the country's healthcare call for addressing the right priorities: "Heal India First," then, "Heal in India."