

INTERNSHIP REPORT

Title:

LEVERAGING MEDICAL TOURISM FOR AFFORDABLE EYE CARE

Internship Organization:

Sankara Eye Foundation India

Intern Name:

Sainee Ashish Bansidhar

Internship Period:

As per institutional calendar

Course:

MBA in Pharmaceutical Management

Institute:

IIHMR University, Jaipur

1. INTRODUCTION

My internship at Sankara Eye Foundation offered a unique opportunity to understand how medical tourism can be a powerful tool in making quality eye care more accessible and affordable. With healthcare costs rising sharply in many countries, people are increasingly exploring treatment options abroad—especially in specialties like ophthalmology where technology, precision, and expertise are critical.

During my time at SEF, I focused on exploring ways to attract international patients who are looking for trusted, cost-effective eye care services. The hospital already has a strong reputation for providing high-quality treatment, and through this internship, I worked on identifying how it can further tap into the global medical tourism market. My role involved studying patient preferences, understanding digital outreach strategies, and exploring service bundling that could appeal to patients from different countries.

This report captures the learning experience, the real-world challenges, and the potential solutions that were identified during the internship. It includes insights from direct observations, discussions with staff members, and a review of market trends. More importantly, it reflects how hospitals like SEF can maintain their mission of service while also expanding their reach globally.

Overall, the internship helped me connect classroom knowledge with practical exposure, and this report serves as a record of the contributions made during my time with the organization.

2. ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Sankara Eye Foundation India (SEFI) is a not-for-profit, community-focused organization delivering world-class eye care services across India, especially targeting underserved populations. With a mission to eliminate curable blindness, SEFI performs over 630,000 free eye surgeries annually through its pan-India network of 14 hospitals.

SEFI's model blends clinical excellence with community-based outreach, organizing eye screening camps in rural and semi-urban regions and promoting health equity. The organization's "Gift of Vision" initiative reflects its commitment to accessible eye care.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research questions:

1. Primary Research: How can SEF effectively leverage medical tourism to attract international patients for eye surgeries and generate sustainable revenue to support its charitable programs?
2. Secondary Research: What are the key factors influencing the choice of international patients for affordable eye care in India?

Data Collection Methods:

1. Primary Data Collection: Primary data was gathered directly from Sankara Eye Hospital through in-person observations, & staff interviews. These firsthand interactions provided valuable practical information about the hospital's workflow, patient management, and service delivery standards. Special emphasis was placed on understanding how international patients are managed and how the hospital is preparing to strengthen its medical tourism offerings, especially in the domain of affordable eye care.
2. Secondary Data Collection: Secondary data collection was conducted using extensive desk-based research. A wide range of credible sources were explored, including peer-reviewed academic journals, government health department publications, organizational reports, and healthcare market insights. Major academic databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, ScienceDirect, and ResearchGate were accessed to review existing literature related to medical tourism and ophthalmology. The research specifically searches keywords such as medical tourism, affordable eye care, ophthalmology abroad, cross-border healthcare, and international patient behavior to filter relevant content. & Analyze case studies of successful medical tourism models in other healthcare sectors.

4. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

1. **Rising Interest from International Patients:** There is a growing number of inquiries and visits from international patients, especially from countries like Bangladesh, Yemen, Uganda, and South Africa. Most of these patients are drawn to SEF due to its affordable surgery packages and the reputation of its surgeons.

2. Cost Advantage is a Major Pull Factor: The cost of ophthalmic surgeries in India is significantly lower compared to Western countries. For example, cataract surgeries that cost over \$3,000 abroad can be done at SEF for less than \$800, without compromising on quality. This pricing advantage is one of the strongest motivators for international patients.

3. Limited Awareness and Visibility: One of the major gaps is the lack of global digital presence. SEF's website and social media platforms do not yet highlight medical tourism services clearly, which limits their ability to reach new international patients.

4. Need for Bundled Service Packages: Unlike some private hospitals offering complete packages (including airport pickup, stay, meals, and translation services), SEF currently does not have bundled medical tourism offerings. This missing element makes it slightly harder for foreign patients to make a confident decision.

5. Strong Clinical Infrastructure: The hospital is equipped with advanced technology like LASIK, femto-laser systems, and robotic cataract tools, which meets global standards. The availability of experienced surgeons adds to SEF's credibility as a destination for eye care tourism.

6. Operational Capacity to Scale: The hospital has sufficient infrastructure and manpower to increase the number of international patients by at least 15–20% without affecting domestic patient services. However, a dedicated desk or team for international patients is currently lacking.

7. Language and Cultural Support is Missing: A recurring concern is the absence of multilingual support staff or translators, which could create discomfort for non-English speaking patients during consultations and recovery.

8. Patient Feedback Highlights Satisfaction: Feedback from international patients was largely positive. Most appreciated the skill of the doctors, hospitality of the staff, and affordability. However, a few mentioned difficulties with coordination and post-surgery follow-up support once they returned to their home country.

5. CONCLUSION

My internship at Sankara Eye Foundation gave me firsthand experience in understanding how medical tourism can be used as a tool to deliver high-quality, affordable eye care to patients across borders. Through this journey, I realized that India, with its skilled doctors, modern technology, and cost-effective treatment options, holds a strong position in the global medical tourism space—especially in specialized fields like ophthalmology.

Sankara Eye Hospital has a solid foundation in place, offering top-notch surgeries and care. However, there is untapped potential when it comes to attracting more international patients. With the right digital presence, structured service packages, multilingual support, and strategic global partnerships, SEF can expand its reach and improve the experience for medical tourists. These improvements can help the hospital generate additional revenue while staying true to its mission of serving the underserved.

Overall, this internship not only enhanced my practical knowledge but also deepened my appreciation for how hospitals can strike a balance between social responsibility and sustainable growth. It reaffirmed the idea that affordable healthcare should not be limited by borders—and that with thoughtful planning, institutions like SEF can play a bigger role in global eye care delivery.

6. LEARNINGS DURING INTERNSHIP

- **Understanding the Concept of Medical Tourism:** I gained in-depth knowledge about how patients from other countries travel for affordable and high-quality medical treatments, and how this impacts hospital operations, marketing, and patient care strategies.
- **Market Research and Analysis Skills:** I learned how to conduct secondary research effectively by analyzing market trends, patient behavior, and competitor benchmarking in the field of ophthalmic medical tourism.
- **Real-Time Exposure to Hospital Operations:** Observing day-to-day functions at Sankara Eye Hospital helped me understand hospital workflows, patient handling, and the importance of coordination between departments for delivering seamless care.

- **Strategic Thinking for Service Development:** I was able to contribute ideas on developing bundled packages, improving digital visibility, and enhancing international patient services—learning how strategy connects with execution.
- **Communication and Interpersonal Skills:** Interacting with hospital staff and observing patient interactions improved my ability to communicate professionally and sensitively in a healthcare setting.
- **Importance of Cultural and Language Sensitivity:** I learned how language and cultural understanding play a vital role in making international patients feel comfortable and respected throughout their treatment journey.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** The internship helped me understand how data from patient feedback, market trends, and hospital records can be used to shape services, improve outcomes, and support management decisions.
- **Balancing Social Impact and Business Sustainability:** Working with a not-for-profit institution like SEF taught me how hospitals can maintain their mission to serve the community while also exploring revenue opportunities like medical tourism.