

Medical travel of Bangladeshis to Kolkata back on its feet

A Monitor Report

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Dhaka : Patients from Bangladesh are rushing back to several private hospitals in Kolkata, to the relief of the latter which depend on them for revenues.

While the number had dropped to almost zero after the second wave of the coronavirus, it has now jumped to around 50 per cent of the pre-pandemic footfall, helped by the fact that land travel to and from Bangladesh resumed on February 25. Hospitals in Kolkata said, according to reports, the number of patients from the eastern neighbours would have been even higher had the third wave not peaked in Bangladesh in late-January and continued till the second of half of February.

By mid-January, RN Tagore International Institute of Cardiac Sciences (RTIICS), which admitted 250 Bangladeshi patients a month and had a daily OPD attendance of 150 from the country before March 2020, had started receiving around 125 OPD patients from the country.

"Admissions, too, had been rising but then the third wave peaked in Bangladesh and the flow ebbed. It has started crawling up with the opening of the land route and the slowing down of the third wave. We are now getting around 80 OPD patients and admitting around 100 a month," said R Venkatesh, Zonal Head, RTIICS. Bangladeshi patients contributed around 10-12 per cent of RTIICS's revenue till the pandemic.

At Peerless Hospital, the number of Bangladeshi patients has jumped to 40-50 a day

at the OPD from zero in early January. Three-four are now being admitted every day. "We would receive 100-150 OPD patients from Bangladesh daily till Covid struck. Ever since, the number has never been higher than 25 per cent of that figure," said Sudipta Mitra, CEO, Peerless Hospital.

A large number of Bangladeshi patients had been forced to discontinue their treatment and defer their surgeries in 2021 following the second wave of Covid-19. With travel restrictions on and medical visas curtailed, it had been difficult for them, said Rupak Barua, CEO, AMRI Hospitals.

"As the OPD footfall rises, many of these will be converted into admissions. We are giving priority to those who had sought treatment earlier but had to suspend it due to Covid. By mid-March, our Bangladeshi patient count should cross 3,000, which is more than what we had before the pandemic," he added.

Fortis has seen Bangladeshi footfall jump from 100 in January to 150 in February 2022. "International business has not recovered to the levels of December and we are still at 60 per cent levels of our peak. Compared to January, the footfall has seen a rise," said Pratyush Srivastava, Zonal Director of Fortis.