

Doctors, the new medical tourists

Vast Array Of Diseases, Modern Methods Draw Students, Medics

By Malathy Iyer/TNN

Mumbai: Tuberculosis and leptospirosis used to be remote terms in Yale medical student Pavithra Venkat's textbooks. A stint at Mumbai's KEM Hospital has changed that. "I have not only encountered these conditions, but I am learning ways to tailor medicine to the cultural needs of the population, like giving protein-rich rehydration solutions based on dal," says the undergraduate who is in Mumbai until January 26.

Further south, Dr Li Ya Lin doesn't feel at home in the streets of Bangalore as he knows little English. But he is a changed man in an OT. The Chinese doctor's verbal handicap is overshadowed by his enthusiasm to pick up the nuances of awake heart surgery—a new procedure in which a patient is conscious through-

out a bypass operation—in Bangalore's Wockhardt Hospital. "Indian surgeons have good hands," he says. He has extended his stay by a month.

They represent a new genre in medical tourism in which students and doctors make trips to upgrade their skills instead of patients coming in the hope of cheap yet world-class treatment. Some students come for workshops while others stay for three-to-six months to pick up super-specialty skills. The Indian medical repertoire is at last getting its due, or so it seems.

There is no central registry to give the exact number of such students trooping into India, but AIIMS in Delhi and KEM Hospital here are reportedly the favourites. AIIMS got about 120 students while KEM got 98 in 2005. Bangalore's Nimhans is another favourite.

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