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Trade fair to let Ontario patients shop for surgeries

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India is positioning itself as an elective-surgery destination for patients wishing to avoid wait times in Ontario.

Private hospitals and clinics there serve tens of thousands of patients a year from Europe, the Middle East, the United States and Canada, Preeti Saran, the Indian consul general in Toronto, told a news conference Wednesday.

To encourage the trend, she said, India is sponsoring a three-day forum and trade fair beginning Nov. 20 at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. Called India Medical Tourism Destination 2009 – Healthcare Without Borders, the fair, the first of its kind in Canada, will enable consumers to shop for spinal surgery, a knee replacement or a cataract operation.

"I've noticed a huge amount of interest (in medical travel) since my arrival in Toronto 11 months ago," Saran said. "People tell me, 'The facilities, the infrastructure, the doctors, I could not have had it better.'"

The Ontario health-care plan, OHIP, has so far resisted funding such overseas medical excursions, said Yasmeen Sayeed, head of Surgical Tourism Canada Inc. and one of the event's chief organizers.

"It is seen as outsourcing to India," she said by phone from her Vancouver head office. But approvals have come on a case-by-case basis, and in some instances, patients have successfully sued the government to pay for the trips, she said.

One attraction is the price, Saran said. A procedure costing \$30,000 in the U.S. might cost \$8,000 in India, she said. The conference website is www.imtd2009.com.