

The POST

'Medical tourism to promote kidney trade'

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ISLAMABAD: Criticising government's medical tourism policy, TheNetwork, a pro-consumer organisation, strongly feels the medical tourism is in fact a label for protecting and promoting trade in human organs in the country which has nothing to offer to the world but low-cost kidneys.

"Desperate to earn dollars, the government is ready to sell anything to foreigners even the kidneys of its poor population", says TheNetwork, in its latest consumer report.

In its recently introduced policy of medical tourism, a term used for one's traveling abroad for medical treatment which is costly at home, the government waived off duties and taxes on import of certain relevant machinery and medicines.

According to TheNetwork, the annual allocation of just 0.5 per cent of GDP for health, coupled with non-availability of basic health facilities to a large segment of population, makes Pakistan an unattractive destination as for medical tourism. Rather, it said, the country has some other attractions for medical tourists and prominent amongst them is kidney transplantation.

TheNetwork insisted that because of no legal cover to human organ transplantation and growing poverty, foreigners are flocking to Pakistan to get a 'donated' or 'purchased' kidney transplanted by spending a lesser amount of money compared with their countries.

"Renal transplant in Pakistan costs a foreigner as low as Rs 300,000 (\$5000) a major share of which is pocketed by middlemen, doctors and transplant centres. The 'donor' gets only Rs 50,000 to Rs 100,000 for selling his or her kidney to an alien patient. In the US, a kidney transplant normally costs Rs six million (\$ 100,000) and the patient has to himself seek a donor for it," the pro-consumer organisation says. It alleged that like health community, the government too is well aware of the names of doctors and health centres involved in this growing kidney transplant tourism practice, mostly seen in Punjab. "Those who are in the dark have only to surf the Internet to view "transplant packages" offered in the international press by private clinics and hospitals located in Punjab."

In the opinion of TheNetwork, the government, by legalising the transplantation under the cover of medical tourism, ostensibly has acknowledged human beings as commodities, the organs of whom can now be sold and used to earn revenue, especially the foreign exchange.