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COVID IMPACT

As pandemic rages on, hotels begin turning into 'Halfway Hospitals'

PAVAN LALL

If the global pandemic spurred hospitality players to pivot to offering staycations and delivering food to consumers in a bid to keep their business engines from coming to a grinding halt, the second Covid wave has brought them even closer to the battle. Some hotel operators are tying up with hospitals to offer their properties as 'halfway hospitals' for patients battling Covid-19.

ITC Hotels has designated four locations so far for the repurposing. An official says, "Most of these hotels have a reasonably large inventory. Intention is to support the cause and help add to the supply of rooms/beds. It is need based and will be evaluated from time to time." The way it works is

that guests who wish to avail this facility are guided to the affiliate hospital, who assess their condition and validate the level of care, medical attention or treatment needed. "Asymptomatic guests are then assigned by the hospital to Welcomhotels."

Jaslok Hospital and Research Centre Mumbai recently started a similar exercise at Taj President, Cuffe Parade. Mayur Kawle who works with Jaslok's marketing team says the rates are at around ₹6,000 for a single room and that the package includes daily meals, is only for asymptomatic or mild symptomatic Covid-19 positive patients, restricted to patients between 18 and 55, offers round-the-clock assistance from nurses and oxygen beds as well priority transitions to Jaslok



Several hotel companies have recently begun partnering with hospitals | EXPRESS

Hospital in the event of any serious ailment and subject to supply of rooms and beds. Prices for other hotels across the country vary based upon location of facility by hotel and

hospital. Jaslok has 175 beds dedicated for Covid-19 and so hotels which have a couple hundred rooms will definitely take the load off all hospitals, says Geoge Alex, COO at Jaslok Hos-

pital. "We think for another month, the demand will be high and hopefully settle after".

ITC's spokesperson said that as part of their affiliation, the hospital would place their designated healthcare professionals to monitor key parameters and guest wellbeing. "They are under hospital supervision. All medical arrangements are taken care of by the hospital," the spokesperson said. For its own part, ITC ensures accommodation, housekeeping, and the right diet as per medical advice. ITC Welcomhotel Dwarka in Delhi was one of the first to offer such a facility supported by Manipal Hospital. Other ITC properties being used for the project include locations such as Coimbatore (GKNM Hospital), Chennai, and Bengaluru. Lemon Tree Hotels has also

offered around 6 hotels to various hospitals in Gurugram, Delhi, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad (as of May 1, 2021) for mild/asymptomatic Covid patients and will be partnering with hospitals such as Apollo and Medanta to offer services that include medically supervised rooms with oral medication, 24/7 doctor and nursing coverage, 24/7 ambulance support, on call consultation with dietician (once), etc.

"This partnership between hotels and healthcare providers will create additional capacity to help manage the second wave. In fact, this combination can be used to create instant and temporary capacity even for the future, which is a big learning," said Patu Keswani, chairman of Lemon Tree Hotels.

Officials say that, broadly, Covid-19 patients fall into three or four categories: The asymptomatic ones; the moderate or mild symptomatic ones; those on the cusp of being serious with commingling complications; and those that are seriously ill. The first two can be accommodated and supported by the 'halfway hospital' model but the progressive requirement of creating an intensive care kind of environment for the last two categories requires intervention by doctors and more sophisticated equipment and professionals. The system requires patients to pay hospitals directly during reservations and admissions, and the medical companies reimburse the hotels.

(The author is a senior journalist based in Mumbai)