

Connecting the dots between diagnostic, admin and clinical systems

Healthcare services delivery in Africa needs to change, but no-one is quite certain how. What is certain is that future trends will be driven by access to big data, to shape new models of care in driving innovative, affordable and accessible services, across this diverse continent.



With 1,2bn people, many enjoying a longer life, and the rise of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) there is a growing recognition of the importance of digital innovation in delivering curative and preventive care.

“The transition to digital healthcare offers opportunities to aggregate patient data from multiple sources - for example, from external healthcare providers and specialists who consult to the patient - to give them a single, accurate patient profile.

“This allows healthcare professionals to quickly connect all the dots in a patient’s care, with a view to focusing on optimum outcomes for the patient. In fact, a study in the *Journal of Neurology* found that putting a digital core at the heart of a healthcare provider, can result in 40% faster checking of medical records during preparation and post-processing of ward rounds in hospital,” says Charmaine Odendaal, healthcare practice lead at SAP Africa.

The continent is characterised by pockets of healthcare excellence, despite each country in Africa being faced with specific challenges. The focus is on the public health system being required to deliver healthcare services that improve patient outcomes at the most optimal cost. But, adds Odendaal, it is essential to recognise that many citizens in Africa live outside urban centres. “We believe that technology will make a real difference in supporting the access to care. From testing to remote patient monitoring to helping patients navigate the healthcare system with digital services. Empowering patients and communities to take an active role in monitoring and managing their health.”

Advances in cancer screening

The power of using a technology platform to improve the delivery of care to patients in Africa was brilliantly illustrated by the Emerging Technologies in Cervical Cancer Screening (ETICCS) solution, developed by the Heidelberg University Hospital and leveraging SAP’s technology platform. ETICCS focuses on identifying women at risk of cervical cancer and delivering end-to-end care by leveraging a cloud-based platform that makes data entry simple and access to patient data and test results immediately available to medical professionals - no matter where they are.

For Odendaal, the success of ETiCCS is further proof of the key role that technology can play in addressing the continent's healthcare challenges. "Our technology powers more than 50 healthcare providers across Africa, and nearly 8,000 globally. We are using the global best practice learned from customers worldwide and adapting it to the African context. This puts the continent's healthcare industry in a great position to leapfrog some of the problems experienced by the more developed markets to fast-track the delivery of connected healthcare to African citizens."

Retaining scarce healthcare talent

Digital transformation is enabling healthcare professionals to reimagine their work. Physicians are increasingly becoming the facilitators of care across the entire care process, while nurses assume greater responsibility by leaving routine tasks to automated systems and focusing on being personal caregivers.

Odendaal says that the shortfall in global healthcare professionals means doctors and healthcare staff are often overworked. "The issue of overworked doctors is a global challenge for the healthcare profession and made headlines in South Africa recently, when it emerged that some junior doctors were working up to 300 hours per month.

"New digital tools allow hospitals to automate repetitive administrative tasks and allowing their healthcare professionals to get the most from their professional training and focus on patient care. With such intense competition for healthcare talent at a global level, allowing doctors and specialists to focus on their highest-value activities – diagnosis, treatment, care – puts hospitals in a great position to attract and retain scarce skills."

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