

Covid-19: shaping Africa's future healthcare systems

The fourth day of the Africa Health Conference yielded discussions on the effect of Covid-19 on the continent's public health services and this is shaping the future of healthcare in Africa, with a particular view on its digital transformation.



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Public Health

In a panel discussion to explore ways in which Africa could become a leader in global healthcare innovation post-pandemic, panel moderator, Dr Moses Kitheka, says that the Covid pandemic had engendered new, unforeseen socio-economic consequences that cut across virtually all sectors.

“Many of these were felt even more severely in Africa, where healthcare systems were already under pressure,” says the public health specialist with over 16 years of progressive clinical, programmatic, and technical experience in the sector.

Alchemy Health Technologies founder, Dr Ntuthuko Bhengu adds that employers have a significant role to play, saying that the workplace is a crucial site for healthcare screening, tracking, surveillance, and possibly even vaccination.

In the session *Tackling infectious diseases threats post-Covid: What's the game plan for African countries?*, Dr Alex Coutinho, a global health leader and medicine and public health veteran, who has worked on the continent for 37 years, shared his insights with interviewer Fatima Abbas.

“Many of Africa’s health systems are premised that customers have to come to facilities.

“During Covid, partly because people were afraid to go to hospitals, people stayed home and sought alternatives,” he says.

“There is a saying: ‘Never let a crisis go to waste,’” Coutinho adds.

“The pandemic presented an opportunity to reimagine how we provide healthcare services to people, especially maternal care, by exploring ways to bring it to the people,” he says.

Digital health

Author and Health Informatics (HI) expert, Dr Raphael Akangbe, spoke about how Nigerian policy-makers have facilitated leaps in tele-health, resulting in Lagos’ healthcare sector’s prestigious reputation as fore-runners in tele-health and digital transformation.

“Many organisations admitted that Covid was the biggest driver towards their digital transformation,” says Robin Njiru, business development manager at Amazon Web Services (AWS).

“We saw a lot of agility in both healthcare and government sectors that had not been seen before. We saw that business, government, and healthcare sectors in Africa can be super-agile.”

Scaling of mHealth

Shleigh Theophanides delivered a presentation on the scaling of mHealth in Africa, and the myriad applications and potentials of this exciting new field.

“The future of health is about sustained well-being.

“This will be driven by digital transformation enabled by radically interoperable data and open, secure platforms, and the empowered consumer,” she says.

Furthermore, Theophanides notes mHealth is a mechanism by which physical access challenges could be addressed in an affordable manner and thereby escalate the drive towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC) coverage goals.

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