

Strengthening healthcare supply chain systems in Africa

According to the Southern Africa's Professional Body for Supply Chain Management (Sapics), the healthcare supply chain industry's most pressing imperative is to upskill professionals to equip them for the ongoing challenges within the of distribution PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) during the Covid-19 pandemic.



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"It is critical that the supply chain community shares lessons and know-how that can help to increase access to quality healthcare, including the Covid-19 vaccine," stresses Keabetswe Mpane, Sapics president.

"Vaccine supply chains are vastly more complex than PPE supply chains. Vaccines are time and temperature-sensitive. Health officials have stated that the Covid-19 vaccine that eventually comes to market will most likely need to be maintained at two to 8 degrees celsius throughout the shipping process.

"Besides the vaccine itself, there are secondary supply chains that must be considered, such as the billions of syringes that will be needed. The world has never needed professional, suitably qualified supply chain professionals more than we do right now," asserts Mpane.

Panel discussion features

Now in its 42nd year, the annual Sapics Conference, which takes place online from 23-24 November will feature a panel discussion facilitated by the Africa Resource Centre (ARC) at next week's 2020 virtual conference will put the spotlight on how governments in Africa are strengthening their health systems by engaging with the private sector.

"It is important to understand how this collaboration can be done at a practical level. This session focuses on the engagement stories and how the public and private sectors are currently working together to improve health outcomes for all," explains Mpane.

As medicine stock-outs can be life-threatening, supply chain professionals must ensure appropriate levels of medicine availability to meet patient needs. The current processes require the already overburdened healthcare practitioners to manage the medicine storeroom, count the stock levels, calculate the replenishment orders, and issue stock to the consulting rooms when required. Many of these process steps fail, resulting in stock shortages.

A presentation by supply chain specialist, David Crewe-Brown will also provide insights on **the design of a new, analytically based replenishment planning process**. It will also offer conference attendees the tools used to create a recommended order, in an effort to automate the stock replenishment process.

A co-presentation by Dominique Zwinkels and Alexis Strader of Unicef (United Nations Children's Fund) and People that Deliver, and Andrew dos Santos of CLX South Africa, will discuss **the desperate need for a workforce with specific supply chain competencies in the health system**.

"Many low- to middle-income countries lack a professionalised supply chain occupational category. Without trained professionals to manage health supply chains, drugs and supplies do not reach the patients who need them," states Mpane.

This presentation will outline the People that Deliver (PtD) Supply Chain Management (SCM) Professionalisation Framework, which is a systematic approach to workforce development, where all practitioners are able to find a career path for growth and development, allowing supply chain professionals to lead and operationalise public healthcare supply chains and achieve country and organisational objectives.

A panel discussion at the conference will also examine **the importance of youth capacity building to enhance the performance of healthcare supply chains**, in order to improve the availability of health supplies and life-saving medicines.

The panel will be facilitated by Chemonics International, an international development company that works with organisations like the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and other bilateral and multilateral aid donors, and has a global network of experts working in more than 75 countries.

Private sector supply chains in the healthcare profession are also under the spotlight with a presentation on the journey that Roche Pharmaceuticals' drug supply chain team went on using the Supply Chain Operations Reference Model (Scor) to identify, assess and optimise performance across the business.

"Covid-19 has put the spotlight on the supply chain profession. When a vaccine arrives, it may literally be up to supply chain professionals to save the world. SAPICS is proud to be playing our part and putting skills development, learning, knowledge sharing and networking at the top of the agenda at this critical time," concludes Mpane.

For further information or to register for this year's online event, call 011 023 6701 or email info@sapoics.org.za.

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