

Digital platforms can reduce critical medical errors

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Greater adoption of digital platforms and strengthening the digital healthcare ecosystem will significantly reduce medical and drug errors in both the private and public healthcare sectors, leading to improved patient outcomes and lower healthcare costs.



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Studies show that around 8% of hospital patients show adverse reactions to treatment – and half of these are preventable.

Although most medical errors do not result in major harm or death, a significant number can have the potential to seriously harm patients through side-effects like permanent neurological damage.

Many of the successes and failures of healthcare can be traced to a single point in the system - that is, doctors making effective decisions with their patients.

In addition, most of the R200bn per year in private healthcare benefits paid by medical schemes is 'steered' by healthcare professionals from the point of care.

Getting it right is of major importance to all healthcare stakeholders, including patients, hospitals, medical schemes, healthcare professionals and big pharmaceutical companies.

Part of the problem is that the world of medicines is in a state of constant change, with new pricing, drugs, science, and data around the safety and efficacy of medicines emerging almost daily.

But here's the issue, says Khan: healthcare professionals are not provided with digital tools that support up to date and full transparency of local medicines pricing in South Africa. This leaves them disempowered in making the most cost-effective decisions for their patients.

To date, much of the digitisation of the healthcare sector has focused on digitising existing processes and workflows, but there has been relatively little movement towards providing relevant and practical clinical and medicines intelligence that empowers better decisions at the point of care.

Most digital systems actually increase the work of the doctor, as they focus on data collection for the funder or hospital.

Effective digital platforms will decrease the burden of admin for the doctor and improve clinical decision making. Clinical and medicines information must be configured into different tools, like dosage tools, reimbursement tools, and tools that monitor and flag drug interactions.

Digital scripting

With digital scripting now starting to take place, the integration of medicines intelligence into the scripting workflow is the critical impact point for healthcare professional decisions and patient outcomes.

These digital tools will also help consumers avoid the dreaded 'co-payment' problem when they fetch prescribed drugs from pharmacies by allowing doctors to take their patients' funding status into account when prescribing medicines. Pricing and reimbursement are major issues within the private sector, in particular.

The pharmaceutical industry has a key role to play in driving greater awareness of medicines at the point of care and it is able to provide support through at most stages of a 'medicine lifecycle' including drug education, safety, reimbursement, and research.

Drug manufacturers must play a greater role in the empowerment and support of healthcare professionals.

They have made substantial investments in the science and development of modern medicines, and it is vital that we provide a platform which allows healthcare professionals to tap into that support in a transparent and unbiased way to be able to optimise decision-making.

There is a wealth of potential product and patient support activity that can be offered effectively through digital channels.

In effect, digital platforms can be the bridge which brings together healthcare professionals, the broader industry, funders, and hospitals by not just pushing content to doctors but allowing healthcare professionals to become actively involved in

reporting drug reactions and how they use pharmaceuticals.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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