

Digital healthcare revolution taking effect in SA

South Africa is witnessing a transformative shift in healthcare accessibility, patient care and quality, driven by innovative solutions utilising ubiquitous mobile technology, particularly WhatsApp.



Source: [Pexels](#)

This more inclusive approach empowers individuals who have long aspired to access private healthcare but faced challenges such as affordability and limited coverage under medical schemes.

Patrick Lubbe, chief executive officer of the National HealthCare Group, sheds more light on this trend, stating, "This shift emphasises sought-after, user-friendly solutions centred around primary healthcare, digital integration, value and convenience."

An example of this healthcare shift can be seen in MediClub Connect. Leveraging mobile communication and chat commerce technology, the service brings accessible healthcare to the fingertips of millions of consumers through mobile phones and WhatsApp prompts.

MediClub Connect offers online interactions with doctors and nurses, referrals for in-person consultations, prescribed medication, and critical services, making it an ideal solution for remote health access.

According to Lubbe, the high cost of data is just one of the drawbacks that many individuals are unfortunately still faced

with in South Africa. “While this needs to change, there are many other pressing challenges in accessing healthcare services, such as a lack of transport, living in remote areas, and being frail or disabled. All of these individuals face various physical, logistical and systemic barriers.”

Lubbe emphasises the personal attention and high-quality healthcare that MediClub Connect provides, enabling anyone with a cellphone running WhatsApp to seek timely health advice, prevent health conditions from deteriorating, and reducing absenteeism from work or time spent in long queues at public health facilities.



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“Mobile devices and tools like WhatsApp enable individuals to access telehealth services, allowing them to consult with healthcare providers remotely. This is particularly beneficial for individuals who have difficulty travelling to medical facilities. They can receive medical advice from nurses or doctors, prescriptions, and follow-up care when needed.

“As chronic diseases continue to claim lives in South Africa, early intervention and efficient management become invaluable. In many cases, telehealth and mental-health counselling with a nurse can promptly resolve concerns or connect individuals with appropriate healthcare resources.

“With a simple WhatsApp message, patients can contact a nurse who can facilitate doctor appointments and ensure access to medication, blood tests, x-rays, dentistry, optometry, and more – all at an affordable rate starting from R95 per employee per month,” notes Lubbe.

Driving inclusive healthcare

The positive response to this accessible healthcare solution resonates with both individuals and companies, bridging the healthcare gap for those relying on government healthcare. The National HealthCare Group's extensive collaborations with healthcare providers and businesses, including TymeBank, Standard Bank, and Old Mutual, have resulted in partnerships to expand affordable healthcare access to more South Africans.

This healthcare solution, launched at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, empowers individuals to monitor their health closely and enjoy professional advice, referrals to general practitioners, and access to medication which they may not have had access to in the past.



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Lubbe also underscores the importance of addressing healthcare access for employers, as they often bear the burden when uninsured employees rely on an overburdened state system.

“Technology, nursing, and co-ordinated quality healthcare are converging to revolutionise the healthcare experience for the better. Telenursing is rapidly finding its place in global health systems, offering surprising benefits by maximising limited medical personnel to reach people across vast geographic areas.

“The potential for telenursing to bring healthcare services directly to the sick and elderly, even in remote rural areas, is game-changing. With WhatsApp entrenched as the preferred communication platform for most South Africans, telehealth has become a practical solution,” notes Lubbe.

While South Africa boasts commendable private healthcare services, this healthcare revolution is driven by a commitment to inclusivity.

Lubbe asserts, "It is our duty to ensure that quality healthcare reaches a far wider spectrum of South Africans than is currently the case. Through innovation, co-operation, and the intelligent use of technology, South Africa can lead the continent in addressing this urgent quest for accessible, high-quality healthcare."

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