

New technologies could bring down healthcare costs

Speakers recently hosted at the Hospital Association of South Africa (HASA) conference held in Cape Town, indicated that new technologies could bring down healthcare costs.



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Smart devices to track inventories, equipment and even patients and doctors in real time, as they travelled around the hospital were just one of many new devices on the market, said Dr Imraan Munshi, a partner at McKinsey & Company. He said there were close to 160,000 high technology health applications now available, that could transform patient record keeping, biometrics tracking, appointment scheduling and inventory management.

"We're seeing technology and social media increasingly being used to keep patients informed and connected during treatment. Mobility and technology can be harnessed to improve patient satisfaction." Teleconsultations, where doctors consulted patients over the phone via Skype or online, were proving popular and effective in some markets, saving time and cost for both patients and doctors.

Optimising time and resources

"Focus on the high impact opportunity areas first," Munshi advised. Hospitals could use data to target care and use real time analytics to make the best use of resources. Manual tasks could be automated to reduce both time spent on administration and to reduce variation. Clinicians and patients also no longer need to be located in the same place.

Also speaking at the conference, expert principal at McKinsey, John Drew said as people became wealthier, healthcare played a bigger part in their lives. With income growth, the proportion of the disposable income consumers spent on healthcare grew over time. "However, healthcare spend globally needs to be curtailed as current growth rates are not sustainable. New business models and innovative approaches are needed."

Innovation at the centre of improved healthcare

Dr Bhavna Patel, CEO of Groote Schuur told the conference that an innovation hub had been established at the 975-bed public hospital. "We want to create a culture of finding innovative solutions to improve healthcare," she said. Patel outlined a number of programmes that had been successfully implemented to improve waiting times, infection control and utilisation of infrastructure such as beds and surgical theatres.

CEO of HASA, Dr Dumisani Bomela said innovation lay at the centre of developing person-centred healthcare in hospitals. "When it comes to innovation, it is not always about novelties or the latest technologies; it is about any change that can be leveraged to improve the processes and outcomes. Quite often it is simple things that can achieve that."

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