



Bringing virtual technologies to the fore

## Description

**One of the positive things Covid-19 instigated was the crucial role that new technologies can play in the future of healthcare.**

South Africans are faced with numerous healthcare challenges, not least physical access to quality health services. This is often because of location, direct and indirect costs. As a result, many people don't visit their doctors regularly, leading to non-communicable diseases remaining unattended and potentially becoming more serious than they might have been.



During the Covid-19 pandemic, an increasing number of people turned to virtual care due to the risks of face-to-face consultations. In South Africa, changes in industry funding policies also showed that virtual care could support early detection and management of existing chronic diseases. These national and international industry changes spurred increased investment and adoption of new technologies to assist with clinical and behavioural decision-making.

### **From awareness to action**

Health awareness is the first step in making any health-related decisions, but often a specific event is needed to trigger action. Aimée Wesso-Roberts, Head of Wellness and Lifestyle Management at Medscheme/AfroCentric Group, believes new technologies can be harnessed to promote proactive behaviour.

“Annual GP visits or health risk assessments at pharmacies and workplaces are often important opportunities to understand your health status,” she says. “However, the motivation for a seemingly

healthy individual is quite low and the barriers, like cost, time and effort, are perceived to be too high.

“This is why we decided to explore virtual care technologies that are complementary to traditional face-to-face care, and which could serve as a first step to understanding your health status.”

Through its mobile platform, AMP, AfroCentric has given clients’ medical aid beneficiaries access to virtual consultations. During the pandemic, all South Africans were given access. In addition, we offered mental health support, increasing access to services that were previously limited due to geography, stigma and/or cost.

### **Mobile magic**



The next step for AfroCentric in realising the potential of virtual care is the deployment of a virtual health screening service that harnesses the power of the mobile phone.

The average South African may not be able to afford a wearable device like a smartwatch, but using

cellphone-based technology combined with scientifically formulated algorithms could dramatically lower the cost of good health. Mobile-based healthcare tools have been shown to accurately determine metrics such as heart rate and blood oxygen levels. Further developments have shown value in assessing breathing rate, blood pressure and even some blood biomarkers using cellphone cameras.

“We are very excited for the potential of this technology to help identify individuals who require face-to-face support and the benefit it can offer in improving appropriate health-seeking behaviour through health awareness,” says Aimée.

As we keep challenging the status quo and embracing new technologies, this initiative is just one of the ways the AfroCentric Group is driving transformation of the health industry by improving access to quality care at an affordable cost.

## Category

1. Our Wellness

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