



Fedhealth evolutionises healthcare with genetic testing

Description

Fedhealth Medical Scheme is partnering with medical biotech company Intelligene to provide genetic testing, adding a groundbreaking new dimension to wellness.

The new system promises to improve medication efficiency, wellness, diet and sports performance and mitigate health risks by identifying possible future illnesses.

Healthcare systems, by their nature, are reactive. Only once disease has set in can we respond and treat it. But what if medicine could be more proactive? With precision medicine, this is becoming a reality – allowing us to not only discover our predisposition to illnesses*, but also which medication will give the best results for treating existing conditions.

Fedhealth is one of the first open medical aid schemes in South Africa to offer its members precision-based genetic testing. Through a pilot programme, members are offered the opportunity for genetic testing to identify possible future illnesses and how they would react to certain medications, making treatment far more effective. This field of study is known as pharmacogenomics.

Free gene testing

“We’ve identified a large group of members currently using chronic medication to manage four specific conditions, including diabetes and hypertension,” says Jeremy Yatt, Fedhealth Principal Officer. “We’re offering to run a free gene test for them to test for drug-to-person interaction, so we can assess whether their current medication is doing the best job possible to manage their condition.”

Fedhealth will also offer gene testing to members with a specific claim history to see if they’re at risk of contracting certain diseases. This testing could reveal, for example, that a person’s body doesn’t process sugar properly, which means they’re at a higher risk of developing diabetes. While they may feel healthy at the moment, knowing this now means they can make lifestyle changes to ensure that they don’t develop diabetes in future.



Customising testing

The gene testing itself is painless and requires a simple cheek swab to be taken and sent to the laboratory for testing. There it is processed, with more than 800 000 gene data points being collected, after which results are securely shared with members and their primary doctors.

Beyond the initial pilot programmes, Fedhealth has negotiated a special rate for those members who voluntarily want to have gene testing performed. Members have the option to customise their tests to look for predispositions to certain illnesses*, or to gather lifestyle data, such as dietary preferences or

the sports to which they are best suited.

“If our pilot programmes that kicked off in March start to deliver results in terms of people receiving better quality care and reducing healthcare costs, we plan to roll gene testing out on a bigger scale so that it becomes an ongoing part of our members’ treatment programmes,” says Jeremy.

The human body is complex and affected by many factors, but Jeremy believes that knowledge is power. “We’re excited about the potential for this technology to improve our members’ healthcare and wellbeing, as well as to empower medical professionals to make better decisions.”

** Please note: Testing for predisposition to certain conditions will only be available from the fourth quarter of 2023.*

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