

Launch of female-founded tech platform drives access to quality healthcare at home

Marked by a critical undersupply of both medical resources and staff, as well as poor career prospects for nurses employed in both the public and private sectors, South Africa is in the midst of a healthcare crisis - one which undermines the wellbeing of patients and healthcare professionals alike.



Source: Supplied.

In public care facilities, this results in prolonged waiting times, ineffective hygiene and infection control measures, and an overall poor quality of care for patients.

As a result, increased pressure has been placed on the private sector to fill the gap. However, for patients, private facilities are considered too expensive for routine care, thanks in part to issues surrounding overtreatment.

Meanwhile, the for-profit nature of the private sector means that healthcare professionals practising in these facilities are often overworked and under-paid. As such, many workers – particularly nurses – are forced to moonlight to make ends meet, leading to physical and mental exhaustion.

To solve these interlinked challenges and advance the wellbeing of both healthcare professionals and patients, a new health-tech platform has been launched. Inspired by the Yoruba word for 'healer' – Noosi is an end-to-end, web-based platform that connects users to verified nursing professionals, to provide home-based healthcare in real-time.

Co-founded in partnership between the Head of the UCT Tech4Good Lab, Dr Sumarie Roodt, and veteran nursing professional with over three decades' worth of experience, Sister Catherine Williams – Noosi promotes the provision of high-quality and compassionate care for users, who can use the platform to access an extensive array of at-home healthcare services.

These include counselling, chronic disease care and management, and mental and psychiatric care, with patients able to cross-reference their healthcare needs against a list of nearby professionals registered on the platform.

Home is where the heart is

Digitally-enabled home-based healthcare has emerged as a popular alternative to patients seeking care, due in part to Covid-19 pandemic regulations, which limited the ability of individuals to access medical facilities, and drove the uptake of telemedicine solutions.

This is backed by research, which has found that – with the growing prevalence of non-communicable diseases and the subsequent need for post-acute and long-term care – personalised environments - such as the home - accelerate recovery times by reducing exposure to hospital-related injury and infection, and by allowing patients to maintain routines, keep busy with manageable tasks, and enjoy the comforts of a familiar environment, including family, pets, hobbies, and the outdoors.



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Says Roodt: “Noosi is founded upon a desire to reinvigorate the South African healthcare system, and we believe that, by leveraging a ‘tech4good’ approach, this can be achieved in a way that simultaneously empowers hard-working nurses with new and improved employment opportunities, while also affording patients with a means of gaining affordable and accessible healthcare.”

Roodt adds that this purpose-led mission has garnered the company several inquests from potential investors, which culminated in Noosi receiving an undisclosed pre-seed investment from Anton Musgrave, partner at Futureworld International, and Vanessa September, chief executive officer of the Constitution Hill Trust, earlier this year.

On this, Musgrave notes that: “As a veteran entrepreneur and seasoned startup angel investor, the Noosi vision is one that has exponential growth potential, particularly as healthcare has become a prominent global issue.

“We have seen tremendous growth in initiatives that prioritise the wellbeing of the public, and the home-based healthcare market is case-in-point. It is estimated that the global home healthcare market size is expected to reach \$634.9bn by 2030, representing ample opportunities for scale – hence my decision to invest in such an amazing initiative.”



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The investment into Noosi also comes as Africa’s health-tech industry has recorded impressive growth over the past few years: In 2020 alone, more than 40 health-tech startups on the continent received series-A funding.

This trend is expected to continue, as governments across the continent recommit themselves to achieving health-based outcomes laid out in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the African Union’s Agenda 2063 roadmap.

September adds to this, saying that: "Across the globe, communities are increasingly recognising that, to realise one's right to good health, we must develop interventions that are patient-centric and approaches that ensure that healthcare services are in tune with patient needs.

"When hearing about this initiative, its aim to empower both healthcare workers and those in need of care, and the fact that it was driven by an all-women team, I was very keen to add my support in the form of an investment."

Towards accelerating access to high-quality and affordable healthcare, Noosi will initially limit its platform to the Cape Town metropole before expanding across several provinces in South Africa over the new year, with global ambitions in the medium- to long-term.

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