

SA healthcare needs public-private cooperation

To improve universal access to primary healthcare in South Africa, the country's public and private healthcare services need to establish smart long-term partnerships.

This is the view of Dr Anban Pillay, Deputy Director General of the national Department of Health, one of the keynote speakers at the 7th Annual Clicks Healthcare Conference which took place at the Emperors Palace, Johannesburg, last week (3 - 5 October 2013).

Pillay believes potential areas for public-private partnership could include the harmonisation of treatment guidelines for disease management and medical coding systems, the utilisation of public hospitals for selected cases and improving revenue collection in public facilities.

He said the essential medicines committee develops treatment guidelines for common medical conditions using evidence of efficacy, safety, quality and cost effectiveness. Currently, medical schemes develop their own guidelines or utilise guidelines from professional groups, resulting in a lack of standardised treatment guidelines across healthcare services. "I also believe this will lead to rationalisation of medicines that are required to be produced and stocked as this will reduce treatment costs."

He said the public would also benefit from public-private partnerships in healthcare. However, an increased mutual understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the public and private healthcare sectors is needed to ensure its success and to develop meaningful collaborations.

"The public healthcare sector for instance provides free access to vaccinations, which benefits the poor, but its facilities are overburdened by long queues. By making medication available through private providers, we can increase access to primary healthcare for poor South Africans."

Clicks currently works with the Western Cape Department of Health to provide baby vaccinations to mothers and babies at all Clicks clinics in the Western Cape. The medication for this service is provided by the Department of Health for free, and the patients pay a small administrative fee.

The Clicks Helping Hand Trust also helps to ease the burden on public primary healthcare facilities by providing free vaccinations at 70 Clicks clinics nationwide to mothers whose babies were born in state hospitals and with no medical aid.

Pillay stressed that the government was eager to expand public private partnerships for baby immunisations to other regions of South Africa, to continue in their quest to provide quality primary healthcare for all.

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