

Digital relationships could help healthcare professionals and improve personalised patient care

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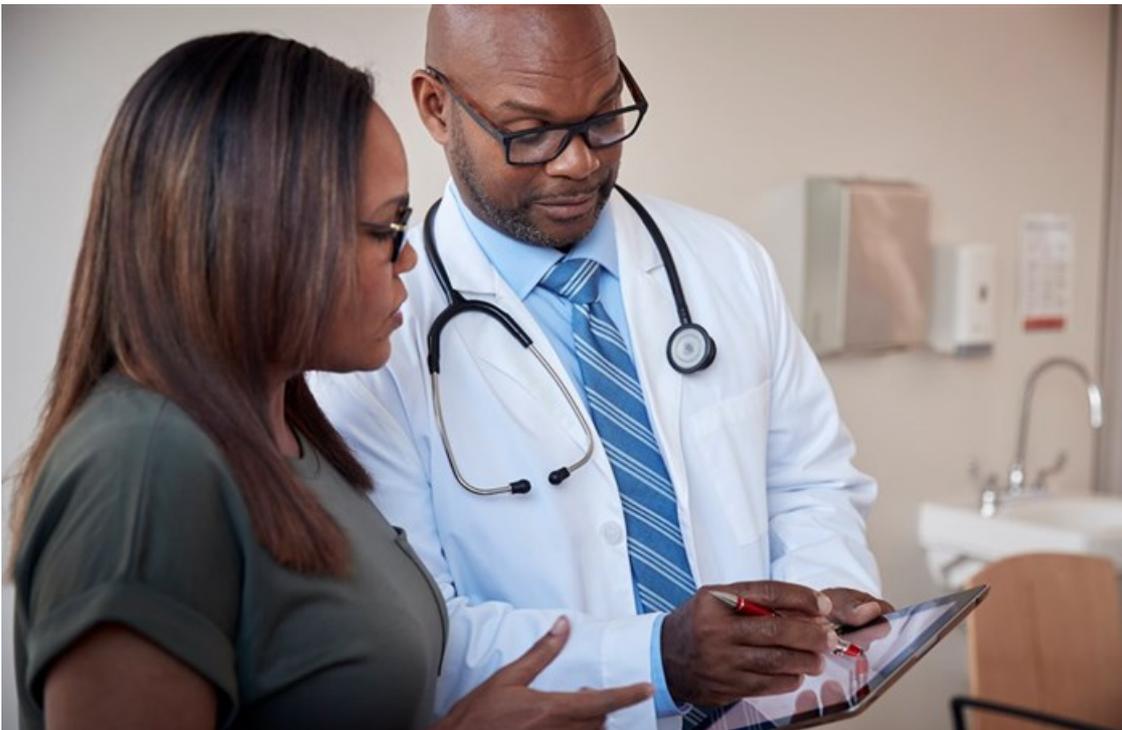
Innovations like Medshield's SmartCare have helped pave the way for telemedicine to be used in South Africa. But is digital really beneficial in healthcare? The answer is yes! Digital relationships have helped lighten the load of healthcare professionals and improved patient care. It becomes easier for care providers to talk to each other and work together, but it also gets patients more involved, allowing care providers to act faster when they need to.

Types and uses of digital in healthcare

Digital relationships can make it easier for people who can't see a doctor or nurse in person to access care quickly, no matter where they live, via telemedicine and remote monitoring. Electronic health records, for example, give doctors and nurses access to much-needed information about a patient. It can be helpful when developing a personalised treatment plan, especially in an emergency. Patients can also have better access to quality information about overall health management or conditions they might suffer from.

Mobile health can provide patients with various resources, including health-related apps, remote monitoring and consultation services, and educational materials to manage their health better. It improves engagement and empowers patients to participate actively in their healthcare. Patients can use digital tools to track their health, ask questions, and actively participate in treatment plans. It allows doctors to provide medical advice remotely, resulting in better outcomes and a more efficient healthcare system.

Wearables like smartwatches and activity trackers can keep track of vital signs, keep an eye on long-term conditions, and give patients and doctors feedback in real time. Such technology can also track activity levels and remind patients to take medication. Data from wearable sources helps doctors monitor patients remotely and adjust treatment plans as needed. Remote monitoring tools can alert healthcare providers to potential issues, allowing for timely interventions to prevent complications. Such immediate knowledge can mean the difference between life and death. Faster emergency interventions are possible when patients require urgent or acute care.



Beyond science fiction to reality

Virtual reality (VR) technology is changing how doctors learn and teach others. Medical students can use VR to simulate surgeries, practice procedures and learn about complex anatomy in an interactive and immersive way without working on actual patients. Augmented and virtual reality can help medical professionals visualise complex anatomy and other medical information in real-time, improving diagnosis and treatment.

Robotics and automation help doctors and nurses do their jobs more quickly and accurately. It lowers the chance of mistakes and makes it possible to do less invasive procedures. Robots can also help in surgeries and other medical procedures, resulting in better patient outcomes by reducing the risk of complications. An excellent example of this innovation in practice is the DaVinci surgical robots now deployed at several private hospitals across South Africa, predominantly used for delicate operations like prostatectomies.

These technologies can also help patients better understand their medical conditions and treatments, improving compliance and overall health outcomes.

The most significant digital innovation in patient care in recent times include:

- Telemedicine and virtual care
- Electronic Health Records (EHR)
- Wearable technology and remote monitoring
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML)
- Big Data and Analytics
- Mobile Health (mHealth) and Health Apps
- Patient Portals and Online Communities
- Robotics and Automation
- Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)
- Blockchain and Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT)

Medshield's digital innovations

Telemedicine is more than just an easy way to get professional healthcare. It restores trust in healthcare – as was seen during the pandemic when telemedicine reduced the chance of getting an infection during consultations. When health professionals use telemedicine and digital relationships, they can give patients more personalised care and treat people who might not have been able to access the care otherwise.

Medshield's SmartCare uses long-term partnerships with clinics and pharmacies. A patient can see a nurse who will do an initial assessment based on the patient's needs and, if necessary, call a GP for a virtual consultation. They will decide how to treat you and show you the way together.

Medshield's Hospital-at-Home service, delivered by Quro Medical, is another innovation that offers safe alternatives to hospitals as the centres of patient care and management. It allows members to receive a personalised treatment plan at home instead of a general hospital ward for a specified period without compromising the quality of care. The Quro Medical clinical team schedules regular home visits, daily or more frequently, to deliver the treatment and care required. Other channels are also available that give patients access to advice and support outside home visits.

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