HealthDart: Google-backed SA healthcare pioneer

An exciting breakthrough for Healthdart has seen this Johannesburg-based startup receive backing from founders Factory Africa and Google For Startups Black Founders Fund 2023.

Source: Supplied. HealthDart co-founder and chief executive officer, Njabulo Skhosana.

Headquartered in Johannesburg, Healthdart's inclusion in the Black Founders Fund cohort, comes with up to $150,000 in non-dilutive cash awards, $200 000 in Google Cloud credits, Google Ads support, and one-on-one mentoring from Googlers and industry experts.

HealthDart works by bringing together an array of technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), to make it easier for South Africans to get the healthcare they need at an affordable price.

For HealthDart co-founder and chief executive officer, Njabulo Skhosana, getting the company to this point is a significant milestone in a journey that's seen him go from a healthcare scientist to someone who's passionate about changing the business of healthcare.

"I'm a pharmacologist by way of background but then kind of got into the business side of healthcare," says Skhosana, explaining that several of his family members are also doctors and nurses.

"I think it's a core passion that's been instilled in me from a young age," he adds. "I've always understood that it's important

to be interested in the medical space and to contribute however I can.”

After a few years of working in a laboratory, Skhosana realised that he wanted to be at the intersection of healthcare and business. That led to a spell in the UK working for Bupa, a multinational health insurance company, before a 2013 return to South Africa to work in Deloitte Consulting’s life sciences and healthcare division.

When asked why he chose to return to South Africa, Skhosana says it was about being where he could make the most impact.

“There's a lot of room to actually make an impact and improve things and innovate and I think when you look across the African continent, that's what it's really ripe for,” he says.

Connecting the dots to deliver sustainable healthcare

Reinder Nauta and Patrick Lubbe 27 Jul 2023

Empowering Africa's healthcare

The HealthDart chief executive officer adds that he also has a burning desire to help Africa realise the downstream benefits that come from improved healthcare systems. Some of the benefits are obvious.

“The faster people can be treated correctly, for example, the less time they need to spend in the healthcare system, freeing up space for other patients to be treated,” he says. “But they’re also going to spend less time and money seeking out treatment. That, in turn, means that they can return to work faster and will have more income at their disposal.”

While Skhosana stresses that a lot of important work is being done to address inefficiencies in both the public and private healthcare sectors, one key component that’s been missing to date is how patients interface with those systems.

“There you've got a lot of inefficiency and fragmentation and that leads to high costs,” he says. “By inefficiency, I mean patients often don't know where it is that they should begin. As a result, they seek care in the wrong places. They might go to the hospital and they just need to go to a clinic or they might start off at a pharmacy instead of going to the doctor when they really need a script.”

AI triage chatbot and digital consultations

That’s where HealthDart comes in. With its virtual triage system, it can help ensure that people seek out the right healthcare providers for their needs.

The company launched an AI triage chatbot in 2022 and is now working with Google to take the chatbot to the next level. But its services don’t stop at triage, it also allows people to digitally consult with pharmacists, doctors, and nurses, bringing further efficiencies.

It additionally allows patients to book consultations, upload scripts, buy medications for delivery to home or work, and make in-app payments.

The benefits of these added efficiencies don’t just extend to patients either. Healthcare facilities, for instance, can provide a better overall experience. Lower spending by patients, meanwhile, means fewer payouts by medical aid schemes and health insurance companies, allowing them to keep annual increases to a minimum.

#StartupStory: Eagle Intelligent Health, connecting patients with doctors virtually

Imran Salie 9 May 2023

“With the state of where technology is now, especially with the efficiencies that you can get from AI,” he says, “you've really got the opportunity to fix a lot of issues not just clinically, but also non-clinically.”

It’s for that reason that HealthDart hopes to work with medical-aid schemes and insurers in the future.

“If we can get the experience to be a lot more cost-effective, not just for medication, but also visiting the right healthcare professional,” he says, “that is very valuable intellectual property (IP). We can lend that IP to the medical-scheme environment and can utilise the learnings and the technology that we've built to benefit medical schemes and primary health insurers to help them run more efficiently.”

The start of digital healthcare

While Skhosana is obviously bullish about the future of digital healthcare in South Africa, and the continent as a whole, he’s quick to caution that South Africa is still at the beginning of its journey on this front.

“We're still literally right at the beginning of the digital transformation process within healthcare,” he says. “We've got 60 million people in the country and I would honestly be shocked if more than a 100,000 have actively used virtual healthcare services on a regular basis.”

But that doesn’t make the work being done to digitise healthcare, including by HealthDart, any less important.

“We know that the way in which healthcare is currently procured, using bricks and mortar infrastructure is just not sustainable,” the HealthDart chief executive officer says. “And we've seen how inefficiencies have contributed to everything from spiralling medical-aid costs to the struggles of public-sector healthcare.

“The truth is the way you bring efficiency into these systems is by using technology and digitising some of the processes.”

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com