



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

GOVERNMENT TO LAUNCH SELF-SERVICE MEDICINE DISPENSING MACHINES

Durban, South Africa:19 July 2016- South Africans will soon obtain their medication from self-service ATM-style machines. This was one of the announcements made by the South African Ministry of Health today at International Aids Conference taking place this week in Durban.

The Pharmacy Dispensing Unit (PDU), currently being piloted at Thembaletu clinic in Johannesburg, is a self-service machine where patients can obtain their medication in the same way people withdraw money at an ATM, a process that most South African are familiar with.

To use the machine, all a patient needs to do is register for the service, after which they receive a card that's similar to a bank card. To "withdraw" their medication, users simply insert their card into the PDU machine, enter their PIN and select the medication they require from their prescription list. The machine, immediately dispenses the selected medication, illuminating the need for the patient to wait in queues. The PDU also allows patients to communicate directly with a trained pharmacist directly from the machine using a built-in video conferencing function.

Addressing the delegates at the conference, Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi said South Africa is running the biggest HIV treatment programme in the world. In three decades, he said, the number of patients on treatment has increased from 400 000 to over 3.4 million. "However, the number of healthcare workers has not kept up with this increase, often leading to frustrated patients and lack of treatment adherence."

"The biggest challenge with not adhering to treatment is that it poses a real risk of the emergence of drug-resistant HIV, in the same way drug-resistant TB came about," Motsoaledi explained. "It is thus imperative that we embrace all available measures to make it easy for people to continue with their treatment."

Other technologies announced by the Health Department include the Stock Visibility System, a mobile application that enables medicine availability information at primary health care clinics to be uploaded to a central online data repository. The camera on the phone can be used to scan the medicine barcode and update stock levels thus enabling health care workers to easily monitor the quantity of medication they have in stock and timeously order medication that might be running low. This will help to reduce the number of stock-outs at clinics.

The Health Department has also launched MomConnect, a free sms service that provides pregnant mothers with regular foetal development updates throughout their term of pregnancy. The popular service already has more than 800 000 registered users.

Delegates also got a glimpse of Mothera2Mothers, a service that connects new mothers to experienced mentors to help them through their pregnancy; the Medication Adherence app, which reminds users of their clinic or hospital visits and to take their scheduled medication; as well as B-Wise, a youth focused online service that provides young people with health information and allows them to have their health-related questions answered by an expert adviser within 48 hours.

These technologies have been developed to enhance public health and have been applauded as best practice.

ENDS

Media Enquiries:

Joe Maila (Health Ministry's Spokesperson) 082 887 3581

Popo Maja (Cluster Manager Communications) 072 585 3219/ 082 373 1169