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MEDIA RELEASE

UP accelerator programme start-up develops government healthbot for delivery of medication for high-risk patients during COVID-19

A University of Pretoria (UP) accelerator programme start-up, Aviro Health, has developed an automated chatbot app, Pocket Clinic for the Western Cape Department of Health which works via WhatsApp and confirms delivery of chronic medication to patients' homes. Pocket Clinic also allows high-risk chronic patients to confirm an existing appointment before accessing services at their attending healthcare facility, which means they do not have to wait in long queues when they get there.

Aviro Health is a design-focused health company that uses digital tools to improve the experience of healthcare. The company specialises in designing and implementing mHealth (mobile health) interventions that address the challenges at the interface between patients and health workers. TuksNovation, UP's technology incubator and accelerator, has supported Aviro Health since February 2019. TuksNovation provides specialised product and business development support and enables technology start-ups to commercialise innovative technology with social and economic impact.

Since the soft launch of the Pocket Clinic healthbot in mid-May 2020, over 700 users have accessed the chatbot app, with over 500 completed orders to receive chronic medication. Additionally, approximately 100 users have requested callbacks from healthcare providers in their respective facilities through the platform. These users all heard about the tool by word of mouth from existing users and made their requests from all over the Cape Town metropole, from Mitchells Plain, Plumstead and Edgemoor, to the CBD.

"The Department wanted a system that would respond to high-risk chronic patient queries timeously and to give people peace of mind that their medication will be delivered to their homes. The system also allows our high-risk healthcare workers the opportunity to assist clients with their queries without placing their lives in danger as well," said Mohamed Sunday, Pharmacist at Mitchells Plain Hospital.

"Not only has the chatbot been of value in helping communities receive their medication, but it has also been an easy way for patients to manage their health without increased risk of contracting COVID-19 and simplified the medication distribution process for staff at our healthcare facilities," said Sunday.

Lyanne Mapani, Product Manager at Aviro Health, says there have been lessons on how the platform can better accommodate users who are requesting deliveries on behalf of patients.

"Together with the Department, we are looking at ways to improve the chatbot so that it can be responsive and better serve users who are accessing it to make requests for their loved ones and fellow community members. The tool is clearly of value, but we want to make sure that we are reaching patients where they are. We are looking forward to launching additional features in the future, such as offering the service in multiple languages and supporting users in booking appointments," said Mapani.

Between April and May 2020, the second and third months of the COVID-19 lockdown in the country, the Department ensured that approximately 159 000 pre-packed chronic medication parcels were delivered to stable patients' homes living in the Western Cape. To ensure the safety of vulnerable patients, the Department has provided all stable and high-risk patients with a two-month supply of chronic medication. Once their medication has been depleted, community health workers will deliver medication to their homes. The Department's data shows people with comorbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, TB, HIV/Aids, cancer, chronic lung disease and heart disease are at higher risk of becoming severely ill with COVID-19. These persons are invited to join the Pocket Clinic chatbot to confirm their medication delivery by adding the number 087 240 6122 to their mobile phones and sending a message saying "hi" to start the WhatsApp Chatbot conversation.

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More about Aviro Health

Aviro Health is a design-focused health company that uses digital tools to improve the experience of healthcare. Our multidisciplinary team complements empirical observation with the qualities of empathy, narrative and meaning, to create significance and change. Ithaka is Aviro's digital platform for empowering patients and improving healthcare accessibility, providing engaging, remote, semi-automated support to patients that improves counselling, reporting and linkage to care; and improves efficiency and outcomes for health workers and programmes.

For more information, contact:

Aviro Health: www.avirohealth.com/contact-us/

TuksNovation: www.tuksnovation.co.za/contact-us

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on the Hatfield Campus, Pretoria. This 112-year-old institution is also the largest producer of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country that has a Faculty of Veterinary Science which is ranked top in Africa, and overall has 120 academic departments, as well as 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 55 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes.

UP is one of the top five universities in South Africa, according to the 2019-2020 rankings by the Center for World University Rankings. It is also ranked among the top 100 universities worldwide in three fields of study (veterinary science, theology and law), and among the top 1% in eight fields of study (agricultural sciences, clinical medicine, engineering, environment/ecology, immunology, microbiology, plant and animal sciences and social sciences).

In May 2020, the annual UK Financial Times Executive Education Rankings once again ranked GIBS as the top South African and African business school. The University also has an extensive community engagement programme with approximately 33 000 students involved in community upliftment. Furthermore, UP is building considerable capacities and strengths for the Fourth Industrial Revolution by preparing students for the world beyond university and offering work-readiness and entrepreneurship training to its students.

As one of South Africa's research-intensive universities, UP launched the *Future Africa Campus* in March 2019 as a hub for inter- and transdisciplinary research networks within UP and the global research community to maximise 4IR innovation and address the challenges and stresses our continent and world is facing. In addition, UP also launched the Javett Art Centre in September 2019 as a driver of transdisciplinary research development between the Humanities and other faculties. In 2020 UP will launch Engineering 4.0. as a hub not only for Smart Cities and Transport, but also to link the vast resources in technology and data sciences to other faculties via Future Africa. These initiatives are stimulating new thinking at the frontier of 'science for transformation'.

For more information, go to www.up.ac.za