

# FIT FOR PURPOSE

A growing number of initiatives are helping to address the woes of the public healthcare system

*By Iga Motylska*

**T**he SA public healthcare sector is under-resourced and understaffed, resulting in long queues at public hospitals and year-long waiting lists, often leaving

those needing medical treatment unable to work. It's encouraging to note then, that in 2017 – after education, and social and community development projects – healthcare initiatives received the third-largest proportion of CSI spend (12%) from SA companies in the form of funds and non-cash contributions.

More than half (51%) of companies surveyed in the Business in Society Handbook 2017 by consultancy Trialogue allocated their CSI spend to healthcare initiatives. The five main healthcare interventions were HIV/Aids initiatives, well-being campaigns, healthcare education,

training and capacity building, and infrastructure, facilities and equipment.

'More needs to be done to emphasise and strengthen the relationship between government, business and civil society, if we are to build resilient communities,' according to Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu, Deputy Minister of the Department of Social Development. 'A healthy relationship is conceivable only when both parties share a common vision.'

She is quoted in the Trialogue report as saying it is 'imperative' that businesses buy into the NDP – the country's blueprint for reducing inequality – and 'channel [their] CSI into realising its outcomes, in partnership with government. Then everyone will be pouring their energies into one effort and the impact thereof will be invaluable'.

Indeed, certain solutions to the challenges experienced in public healthcare will come in the form of public-private partnerships and the investment in human capital. As of 2013, 23 healthcare companies operating in SA, including Aspen, Bayer, Clicks, Dis-Chem, Discovery, Life Group, Mediclinic, Netcare and Pfizer have been contributing at least 0.75% of their net profits after tax into the Public Health Enhancement Fund (PHEF) – a central fund governed by a social compact forum with the Health Department, which identifies key projects and beneficiaries.

Stavros Nicolaou, PHEF board chairman and Aspen's senior executive responsible for strategic trade, explains that in the long term, the fund sets out to put 100 medical doctors from rural, resource-constrained communities through medical school.

'Additionally, in partnership with the South African Medical Research Council, we're funding 100 masters and PhD students who are doing research in HIV/Aids and tuberculosis, over a six-year period,' he says.

The students constitute 10% of the country's target in respect of medical masters and PhD students, and are part

of a 10-year plan to bring 1 000 masters and PhD students into the medical sector.

Aspen prioritises its CSI efforts in various skills development and education programmes that empower historically disadvantaged individuals and promote equality transformation. In 2017, the pharmaceutical group invested R14.2 million in 113 socio-economic development projects throughout SA, of which R5 million was allocated to PHEF and R5.9 million to the company's external bursary scheme, which awarded 85 bursaries to students studying locally within the life sciences faculty, including engineering and MBAs.

'Aspen looks at CSI from a point of view of contributing towards a more sustainable, stable and socially cohesive country. We try to address the challenges of unemployment, inequality and poverty,' says Nicolaou. Furthermore, Aspen's enterprise development programmes and preferential procurement objectives support the emergence of black-owned and black female-owned businesses. The company's BEE procurement spend amounted to R3.8 billion, equating to 81% of 2017 procurement spend.

In line with other major players in the healthcare sector, Discovery supports government's development priorities by contributing to various public-private deals, through the Discovery Fund and the Discovery Foundation. According to Ruth Lewin, head of corporate sustainability at Discovery, the company's approach is based on activism through CSI. 'Our view is that historical approaches to CSI, traditional philanthropic or charitable approaches, may not be sustainable, nor conducive to developmental goals.'

Discovery is working with the City of Johannesburg to investigate what is required by the city and communities in need, and to build strategic partnerships to address these challenges. 'We believe in the principle of community ownership,' says

Lewin. 'This is critical to ensuring the sustainability of the programme. The community is consulted regularly to ensure services offered through the programme are relevant.'

'While key collaboration underpins all our CSI efforts, we continually seek out innovative and strategic partnerships that allow for maximum impact through our work to support the National Development Plan's focus areas and uplift South Africa as a whole.'

In 2017, the Discovery Fund supported 57 projects with contributions totalling R32 million, which focused on strengthening primary healthcare across SA, by developing human capital and improving primary healthcare service delivery through initiatives such as MomConnect, NurseConnect and the Impact Bond Innovation Fund.

At the same time, the Discovery Foundation – an independent trust that addresses the skills and capacity shortfall affecting public healthcare – also advances medical research and develops research centres. Last year, R22 million was committed to the foundation, which resulted in 78 awards being granted, of which 59 went to individuals and 19 to institutions.

Together with Standard Bank and the University of Pretoria, Discovery launched the Medical Student Loan Guarantee Fund to support medical students who are unable to secure funding. Since 2016, more than 100 medical students have benefited and, as of this year, the loan fund includes Wits University. The Discovery Foundation MGH Fellowship Award – in partnership with Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), Harvard Medical School's largest teaching hospital – enables talented SA specialist clinicians to conduct year-long research at the healthcare facility. The award, valued at R2.1 million, has been granted to four recipients since 2013.

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Meanwhile, Mediclinic's CSI projects aim to directly ease the public healthcare sector's lack of resources and facilities. During the 2017 financial year, it joined with the Western Cape, Free State and Limpopo provincial health departments to undertake more than 100 pro bono surgeries on public healthcare patients in seven Mediclinic hospitals. Some patients had been on the waiting list for two years. These public-private initiatives help alleviate the long waiting lists and backlog at many of the country's busiest public hospitals.

The initiatives also offered Mediclinic's technology, such as the Da Vinci surgery system, and facilities where public-sector surgeons could operate. The second phase, which is being rolled out during the 2018 financial year, will see another 100 pro bono operations being undertaken.

Outlining Mediclinic's approach to CSI, Dr Biren Valodia, chief marketing officer of Mediclinic Southern Africa, says that alongside its R5 million annual contribution to PHEF, 'Mediclinic is also committed to training more nurses through our seven nursing academies situated across

South Africa'. During 2018/19, he adds, 'we plan to develop a working relationship with relevant provinces to establish reciprocal training of nurses. Private-sector nurses will be seconded to the public sector for specific training elements, and similarly the public-sector nurses will be seconded to the private sector for training'.

Four Western Cape Mediclinics also host Stellenbosch University medical students in their fourth and fifth year during their mid-clinical rotation in internal medicine, to further ease the pressure on public hospitals. Seventeen students are accommodated during each four-week cycle, resulting in 119 annual rotating students. They work one-on-one with a specialist while learning how to approach a diagnosis and what treatments are available as well as improving their knowledge, experience and self-confidence in the medical field.

Now in its 13th year, the Dis-Chem Foundation – a beneficiary of the Dis-Chem Pharmacies Benefits Programme, whereby members earn loyalty points on their purchases and donate a portion of their spend

to the foundation – is collaborating with NGOs that operate in underprivileged schools, orphanages and old age homes. They address issues such as mental and physical health, hygiene, food sustainability, abuse, abandonment, homelessness and national disasters support. The Dis-Chem Foundation has assisted in excess of 1 500 beneficiaries and reached more than 2.3 million South Africans, earning it the PMR Diamond Arrow Award in the Corporate Social Responsibility category every year since 2011.

For the third year running, it has joined the Smile Foundation to offer children facial reconstructive surgery during Smile Week. The joint partnership with the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital is the first public-private deal of its kind undertaken by the hospital. In 2018, 17 children between the ages of three months and 13 years underwent surgeries that included cleft lip and palate repairs, the insertion of tissue expanders for burn victims, and second-stage ear reconstruction.

While many companies manage internal sustainability departments, others channel their funds and non-cash donations through registered NGOs. Blockchain technology, for example, 'allows for provenance and insight into where something has come from in terms of traceability', says Tanya Knowles, managing executive of Fractal Solutions.

In terms of its potential use for CSI projects, it has the ability to trace funds, medication and vaccines and ensure they reach the designated individuals and institutions. It can also catalogue how donations were spent, she explains.

'Blockchain also allows us to cut out corruption and bypass the middle man.' In the future, CSI initiatives and foundations could use the blockchain to be wholly transparent, which may in turn encourage greater contributions on behalf of the public and private sectors as well as individuals. ■