Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Business Opportunities South Africa: Healthtech AI & Robotics

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BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

HEALTHTECH AI & ROBOTICS

SOUTH AFRICA

Globally, AI and robotics are being used increasingly in the healthcare sector. In South Africa, owing to their significant cost, the majority of these technologies will primarily find a market in the well-resourced private sector. At the same time, there may well be public sector interest in selected technologies, which either reduce costs or help to solve problems which are particularly acute in the public sector such as the challenge of service provision in rural areas. The large private hospital groups in South Africa are already using high-tech surgical robotics. For example, Intuitive Surgical's da Vinci surgical robotic technology is used at three Netcare hospitals to treat localised prostate cancer. There is still relatively low implementation of AI solutions, but there are some examples, e.g. Mediclinic has recently installed Philips' connected care enterprise monitoring and patient care solutions in 21 of its hospitals, which will enable big data analysis.

POTENTIAL INTERESTING SECTORS AND COMPANIES

- Larger private hospital groups: Life Healthcare, Netcare and Mediclinic
- National Hospital Network (NHN), a network of private hospitals that has been granted permission to collectively bargain and procure goods and services, and represents 25% of the private hospital beds in South Africa.
- Cape Health Technology Park
- Provincial Departments of health

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATION

Diagnosis and treatment decision support systems

Current decision support mechanisms in South Africa are basic and do not make use of AI. There are therefore opportunities for more sophisticated solutions to enter the market.

Robotic and augmented reality teaching tools

Robotic and augmented reality teaching aids could readily find a market in South Africa, if they are seen to either enhance current teaching methods and/or can be used to address teaching staff shortages.

Medical imaging

While there is significant innovation in the domestic market, commercialisation of these technologies has proven difficult, due in part to the relatively small size of the South African private healthcare market. This is a possible area for collaboration between Dutch and South African firms, which may allow a Dutch company with access to larger markets to leverage off South Africa's relatively lower cost of research and development.

Research & Development

The South African Medical Research Council has partnered with the University of Cape Town to investigate ancestral groupings in the current populations of Southern Africa, and related susceptibility/resistance to disease, with a view to applying precision medicine and enhancing the targeting of interventions to improve health outcomes.

Automated delivery and dispensing

The public sector is potentially a large purchaser of automated delivery and dispensing technology as evidenced by the South African National Blood Service's use of drones to deliver blood supplies to rural areas, as well as of other technologies which reduce cost or mitigate staff shortages.

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The Netherlands & You

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