

The design of a digital innovation to improve access to medicines in Zimbabwe

Research in progress.

Abstract

The advertising of medicines to the general public is prohibited by law in many settings. This is to protect members of the public, considered unable to make objective medical judgements for themselves, from predatory marketing practices that could result if pharmaceutical advertising proceeds unregulated. In efficient health systems, the regulation of medicine advertising poses no threat to access because patients and their caregivers, can reasonably expect to find medicines prescribed, after one or a few stops at pharmacies in their immediate vicinities. In other health systems however, for example in Zimbabwe, broader economic challenges such as declining manufacturing industry capacity and shortage of foreign currency for drug and pharmaceutical raw material imports negatively affect the pharmaceutical supply chain, leading to the sporadic supply of medicines in pharmacies. Systemic shortage of medicine coupled with the fact that the pharmacy are prohibited from communicating to patients the medicines they have available leads to wide spread inefficiencies in patients access to medicine. Efforts to address this problem are underway through the user-centred design and testing of a digital platform where professionally crowdsourced, up to date data on pharmacy stocks is kept for the purposes of increasing the transparency of pharmacy stock information to improve the accessibility of prescribed medicines. The platform will facilitate the real time identification of the location of specific medicines . Experiences of managing this in Zimbabwe may offer ideas for other inefficient health systems currently struggling in similar ways.

Researcher and Affiliation: Dudzai Mureyi - University of Edinburgh