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Summary

PatHS (Patient Health Systems) is a CEC Pretoria project that aims at developing patient-oriented user-friendly software solutions for managing chronic lifestyle diseases to improve the quality and efficacy of primary healthcare system. This article explains how the project is directly empowering and exposing healthcare workers to technologies that they never thought that they would access.

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The world is aggressively taken by the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), with the penetration into various societies causing the digital divide within the societies themselves. This was revealed by the training that SAP Research CEC Pretoria provided in rural Mpumalanga and the urban areas of Gauteng. The PatHS project (a collaborative research project between SAP Research, the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) and Inathi Technology Holdings, and with the permission of the Department of Health) is, amongst other, evaluating Inathi's Syscare system which is aimed at assisting health care workers to record and manage patients' medical history. The first step in implementing this system on-site was to provide health care workers with basic computer literacy training for a week.

PatHS (Patient Health Systems) is a CEC Pretoria project that aims at developing patient-oriented user-friendly software solutions for managing chronic lifestyle diseases to improve the quality and efficacy of primary healthcare system. Agincourt Community Health Clinic (ACHC) is based in the rural outskirts of the Mpumalanga province. The ACHC offers various health supports to the community of Agincourt, ranging from child health care, HIV-AIDS, and other opportunistic diseases. Health care workers (HCW) in this clinic are quite passionate about their job and were very excited about SAP, WITS and Inathi's initiative to train them on how to use computers. The ACHC health care workers were not afraid of using computers even though it was for the first time in their lives. The HCWs were, on average, aged between 25 and 50 with very little or no computer literacy. It was a great experience to even see the older generation taking part in this initiative with the same enthusiasm as the younger people. Our trainees' difficulties in operating computers were mainly in using the mouse, typing, creating folders and running programs such as MS Word and MS Excel. These are basic things that the majority of people assume they can easily operate. However this was not the case with the HCWs of ACHC. Hence they felt that one week training was not sufficient for them to learn basic computer usage. These HCWs were totally amazed at what a computer could do for them. They encouraged and helped each other to learn and complete tasks.

ML Pessen Clinic is based in Randfontein, Gauteng, a gold mining town in western Gauteng. Its economy is dependent upon the local gold and uranium mines, as well textile manufacturing. The ML Pessen HCWs had varying computer literacy levels. Some HCWs had some sort of computer literacy, either self-taught or taught by family members. Most of them also had computers at home being used by other family members. As a result, there was a wide variation in skills, past experience, learning styles and motivation. This led to a personalized training approach to pace the participant's needs; for instance, extra exercises was given to the computer literate HCWs. They were also encouraged to assist their peers when necessary. Their biggest challenge was the use of the mouse and keyboard. Most HCWs were frustrated by the fact that they could not find certain keys on the keyboard. Some HCWs showed great keenness to learn, they tried to get "hands-on" with the computer after hours, and some used their family computers at home to furnish these skills before the next training session.

To accommodate the HCWs' needs, the training was more pragmatic and more responsive to the immediate needs of the busy HCWs who had other clinic duties in between and after the training. Though we experienced some differences amongst the Mpumalanga and Gauteng groups in terms of their computer literacy levels, it was important to note the relief they expressed upon noticing how helpful computers are. The HCWs were very eager and excited to understand the functioning of the computer system. After the training sessions, some HCWs could stay a bit longer to practice, proving the saying "once they've had a taste of power, it's almost impossible to break the addiction".

The fascination that prevailed throughout the training indeed revealed that digital divide still exists in our communities. This really proves the motto that 'together we can'. With the PatHS project all are working together towards improving rural health care systems and improving the skills of our health care professionals. Such initiatives are important in a sense that whilst companies are introducing systems to assist working processes, the communities get empowered and exposed to technologies that they never thought that they would access.

For more information, please contact [Florah Modiba](#).

In addition, be sure to check out video "SAP Helps Combat Illness in Africa", recently produced by SAP TV, which features Project PatHS, available in both [English](#) and [German](#).

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