

Partnership to improve public health supply chains ahead of Covid-19 vaccine roll-out

A new partnership between The Professional Body for Supply Chain Management in Southern Africa (Sapics) and the International Association of Public Health Logisticians (IAPHL) will promote professionalism and community in South African public health supply chains with the objective of improving the availability of healthcare supplies and life-saving medicines, including the Covid-19 vaccine.



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Health crises like the ongoing Ebola outbreaks in the Democratic Republic of Congo and, most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic, have highlighted the critical need for improvements in global healthcare supply chains, says Keabetswe Mpane, Sapics president.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), vaccinating the world against Covid-19 will be one of the largest mass undertakings in human history, and we will need to move as quickly as the vaccines can be produced.

"The health commodity supply chain, particularly in the public sector in Africa, has traditionally been managed and operated by healthcare professionals with an intuitive understanding of supply chain operations, but often without the relevant supply chain training or relevant qualifications," notes Mpane.

Private, public healthcare collaboration

"There is a need to increase the capabilities and skills of the existing supply chain resources while creating awareness and an environment that will attract appropriately skilled supply chain professionals. There is also an imperative to ensure that effective collaboration takes place between private and public healthcare and other involved role players. In this way, we can improve health outcomes in South Africa and across the continent."

She asserts that the increasing complexity of the public health supply chain, together with the burgeoning demand for health commodities, is driving the need for a more transparent, equitable, efficient and responsive supply chain.

Through a memorandum of understanding with the IAPHL, Sapics will leverage its expansive network of members and partners, as well as its resources and infrastructure, to grow and develop the IAPHL's local presence and influence. Working with both the private and public sector, regular educational events and discussion groups will take place to give the local community a platform and place to meet. Membership of both the IAPHL and Sapics will be promoted by both organisations.

"Working together, we will increase the profile of the health supply chain professional and create awareness to attract new talent," expands Mpane. "We will foster collaboration across the various stakeholders, including supply chain professionals, healthcare workers, healthcare supply chain professionals, academia, industry, and supply chain service providers.

Driving Africa's public health supply chain

"By improving collaboration and information sharing across the public and private health sectors, we aim to draw on lessons learned from other industries. Together, Sapics and IAPHL will provide insight into the requirements of the highly regulated health commodity supply chain. By providing direction and input to relevant faculty curricula, we will ensure that health logisticians are equipped with the relevant skills. Collaboration with appropriate international associations and organisations will also deliver important alliances throughout Africa."

"This powerful partnership will drive improvements in Africa's public health supply chains and ultimately save lives," comments Walter Proper, executive director of the IAPHL. "Public health logisticians have a critical but often undervalued role in providing life-saving health services. Especially in developing countries, supply chain management is often not recognised as a profession that requires specialised training.

"The IAPHL supports logisticians worldwide by providing a forum for members to network, exchange ideas, and improve skills. Members come from nearly 140 countries, a variety of professional backgrounds, and represent all levels of the supply chain. We are delighted to be joining forces with Sapics to work towards realising the IAPHL vision of a world in which all people have access to life-saving health commodities."

In line with Sapics's collaboration with the IAPHL, 20 IAPHL members received sponsorships to attend the annual Sapics Conference, which took place on 23 and 24 November.

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