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11 November 2019

UCT students finding ways to revolutionise SA health sector

Under the Futures in Health Accelerator Project, led by the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Surgical Society (SurgSoc), students from across faculties joined forces to develop futuristic ways in which to improve healthcare in the country.

Spearheaded by the SurgSoc's Liam Devenish (fourth-year MBChB/MSc), Siphon Ndereya (fourth-year MBChB) and Matthew Potter (final-year MBChB), the project takes the form of a student-run incubator that seeks to assist multidisciplinary teams to cultivate disruptive ideas with one common thread – to advance this crucial sector.

Teams were allocated just seven minutes to pitch their novel ideas at the event and a panel of industry experts was allowed seven minutes to ask questions, provide suggestions and, where necessary, poke holes in their concepts.

"The programme is intended to facilitate learning and growth, incubate disruptive ideas and foster social innovation that is sustainable, economically viable and underpinned by a design-thinking approach," Devenish said.

Medla was one innovative idea. The proposed one-stop-shop aims to consolidate personal records using a smart technology application, giving patients easy access when they need it most. The concept looks at ways in which patients can tap in online, check their medication lists and what the medication is needed for, and even examine records from their last consultation with their doctor.

The proposed roll-out is easy: patients would register online or download the application to start their Medla journey.

Qut is a similar concept. The scheduling system seeks to enable healthcare providers to reduce waiting times at facilities and address non-arrivals as a result of a protracted in-hospital system – a common problem in South Africa.

It examines the best ways to eliminate queues, by scheduling visits, booking appointments and selecting a clinic and time slot that suits the patient's individual needs. The system is designed to empower patients to make use of a simple, flexible and accessible platform, via cell phone, that collects data and improves patient flow.

Potter told the audience that the idea for the project came after they had witnessed first-hand the number of challenges faced by South Africa's health sector. "We work in a system that is overburdened and it's debilitating to say the least, even at this early stage in our careers," he added.

"It's a fundamental disconnect between what we understand are the needs in South Africa and what we actually have available in the sector."

To help get it right, he noted, making use of the resources, regardless of their limitations, and drawing on the expertise of professionals in other fields for different ideas is key.

"We need to develop ideas around how to address problems in South Africa."

ENDS



Nick Loxton, president of the UCT Surgical Society (left,) is seen here with (from second left) Siphon Ndereya, Matthew Potter and Liam Devenish, who are heading up the Futures in Health Accelerator Project.

Credit: Benton Geach/UCT

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Team Qut came up with the idea of a scheduling system which looks at how best to cut the queue at public health faculties.

Credit: Michael Hammond/UCT

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Nick Loxton, president of the UCT Surgical Society (left,) is seen here with (from second left) Siphon Ndereya, Matthew Potter and Liam Devenish, who are heading up the Futures in Health Accelerator Project.

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