

SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE MINISTER FOR MEDICAL SERVICES, HON. (PROF) P.A. NYONG'O, EGH DURING THE E-HEALTH CONFERENCE IN NAIROBI ON 18TH APRIL 2012 AT INTER-CONTINENTAL HOTEL

- **Distinguished guests,**
- **Ladies and gentlemen,**

I feel greatly honored to be invited to address this Conference on integrating m-health into e-health strategy implementation.

We are greatly honored by your presence. The conference has been organized by the Government of Kenya with support from our development partners and other stakeholders in ICT industry, who have enabled delegates in the region to come together to learn, share and discuss the power and potential of mobile technologies to improve health and patient care around the African continent.

I am informed that the theme of this conference is **“integrating m-health into e-health strategy implementation.”** This theme is both relevant to health workers in Kenya and to the people of Kenya. I say so because this is taking place within a period of the Government launch of Vision 2030 whose goal is to make the country a globally competitive and prosperous nation with high quality of life as is envisaged in the Millennium Development Goals and the Kenya’s Economic Recovery Strategy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the success of any country depends on how well it applies the latest Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to accomplish its

tasks and operations locally and globally. This conference has come at an opportune time when our countries are strengthening ICT.

The making of information common (communication) through application of knowledge (technology) is what has developed into what is today referred to as Information Communication Technology. This is a term that describes any communication device or applications encompassing radio, TV, cellular phones, computer, satellite systems, and services associated with communication such as videoconferencing, chatting, outsourcing, online journalism, e-learning, e-library, e-health, m-health among others which are all in the toolkit of today's professional.

With ICTs we are witnessing countries take a leap towards technological advancements. This implies that, no country or organization can escape the influence brought about by ICTs due to their persuasive nature in the modern community.

Ladies and Gentlemen, healthcare in Africa is on the frontlines of drastic transformation. The advancements in ICT coupled with unprecedented rises in mobile penetration offer an unparalleled opportunity to innovate around quality healthcare delivery to the masses.

Sub-Saharan Africa faces the challenges of a huge disease burden, low health expenditures and a small health workforce ill-equipped to tackle the growing disease burden. In fact, Africa is estimated to have approximately 25% of the global communicable disease burden and yet only comprises 1% of total global expenditure on healthcare and contains only 3% of the global health workforce.

Here in Kenya, challenges in healthcare are commonplace-we grapple with human-resource shortages where we have an estimated doctor-patient ratio of 1:10,000 and we still have a ways to go in achieving the MDGs. As such, e-Health, the combined use of electronic communication and information technology in the health sector, offers a vehicle to creatively proffer solutions to these healthcare challenges.

In 2005, the World Health Assembly recognized e-health as the method necessary to achieve cost-effective and secure use of ICTs for health, and urged its Member States to consider drawing up long-term strategic plans for developing and implementing e-health services and infrastructure in their respective health sectors.

Given the responsibilities placed on our shoulders by Africans, it can no longer be business as usual. Our priority should be to strengthen and stimulate access to healthcare in our continent. The development of new technologies has created a new global communication explosion. The mobile technology is the most intriguing of the new electronic method that is changing health communication in Africa.

Mobile health (mhealth), or the use of wireless networks and mobile devices to support health care, offers several solutions and models of success. Cellular phones have revolutionized the way people communicate. It is possible to listen to radio, receive audio and video streaming, send text and access internet through the mobile phone technology. They are basis for information gathering as well as communication. These services promise to increase quality and access to healthcare in sub-Saharan Africa.

mHealth stands at the intersection of these two global trends. And for two days this week, the eHealth conference is providing the platform for discussions about the future integration of mobile technologies with medical research, information, diagnosis, treatment and care around the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me now share some insights into what is currently being done by the government in Kenya in the health sector.

In Kenya the performance of the health sector is affected by the high cost of healthcare contributing to poor access, declining standards of living, resurgence and emergence of diseases, high cost of drugs and inadequate funding.

In Kenya we believe that the source for growth and higher productivity is the dissemination and use of ICT to all sectors of the economy and the use of new applications. Kenya's Vision 2030 identifies the Health Sector as an essential component to National Development. One of the goals in Kenya Vision 2030 is to improve the overall health outcomes and indicators of Kenyans by shifting focus from curative to preventive and promotive healthcare.

We have already elaborated an e-Government policy and strategy to facilitate a system-wide implementation of programmes in line ministries. The Government of Kenya continues to provide investors with attractive incentives and an enabling environment for the further growth of the industry. In particular we practice a complete waiver on ICT equipment.

In August, 2011 the Government of Kenya launched our first National e-Health Strategy 2011-2017 which is integrated with Vision 2030-the overall goal in health

of which is to have a healthcare system that ensures “equitable and affordable healthcare at the highest achievable standard” for Kenyan citizens.

The vision of the e-health strategy is to develop efficient, accessible, equitable, secure and consumer-friendly healthcare services enabled by ICT. The mission is to promote and deliver efficient healthcare services to Kenyans and consumers beyond our borders, using ICT.

The new strategy focuses on improving the way information is managed in 5 key pillars: Telemedicine; Health information systems; Information for citizens; M-health and E-learning.

Kenya Medical Supplies Agency (KEMSA), a National health supply chain, shows that "better information flow outperforms holding more [drug] stock closer to the health facility." KEMSA is currently implementing a robust Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system which will improve efficiency in all KEMSA supply chain processes and enhance tracking and tracing of medical commodities to the public health facilities.

Let me provide you a glimpse into some of our other initiatives:

- The Community Based Program Activity Reporting (COBPAR) system - developed in-house at the National AIDS Control Council on an Open Source
- Set of standards for EMR systems in the country (with functional/ interoperability profiles and guidelines for implementation and human resource capacity building).
- Building of Enterprise Architecture (EA) for systems in the health arena-

- E-Health sub-systems as part of NASCOP's strategy for HIV/AIDS and STI disease surveillance among others.

The fibre optic and satellite are already creating wonderful opportunities for quality healthcare through information sharing, timely diagnosis and use of eHealth solutions. The mPesa system is now universally recognized as the global torchbearer in socially inclusive financial systems enabled by basic technology which is the mobile phones. In Kenya mPesa allows everyone to send money, withdraw cash, buy airtime, pay bills, buy goods, have ATM withdrawal and check balances through their mobile phones. The system can also be used to pay medical bills.

We also have the example of Changamka Microcredit Limited which developed the innovative e-card after reviewing data from the Kenya Advertising Research Foundation (KARF) and the Association of Kenya Insurers (AKI) that over 80 per cent of Kenyans are excluded from formal medical arrangements. This e-card can be used to cover the costs of a doctor consultation, laboratory tests and medication. And of course, we have several other initiatives and companies like [OpenMRS](#), [DHIS2](#), [Child Count](#) that are critical in improving health here.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I always remind myself of the old wisdom that the best way to predict the future is to shape it. We need to consider the following:-

1. Develop strategies that can guide the implementation of mHealth programmes. For those of us who have not developed strategies in our respective countries, we need to develop them and fast track their implementation.

2. Establish cohesive mHealth infrastructure and efforts directed toward systemic growth. Currently, many mHealth applications are single-use or "point" solutions – specific to only one population or built to solve just one problem.
3. Leveraging mobile financial services (mMoney, mBanking and the like) to help improve access to medicines and drive both supply and demand for related health services. Mobile finance tools can be used to determine when, where and how money is flowing throughout the global health supply chain. The flow of financial data related to health has the potential to increase transparency about the cost of drugs, contract execution, budget allocation and the efficiency of donor financing. Such transparency also has the potential to reduce corruption and decrease counterfeiting activities.
4. Human Resource and Institutional capacity among others.

It is clear that mHealth has the potential to improve access to medicines and strengthen health systems and economic development worldwide. Our challenge now is to keep the conversation going, and to improve and expand upon the success already being realized through the use of mobile technology.

I am delighted that the Donor Community has given strong indications that they are willing to work with us in this endeavour that ultimately aims at improving the quality of life and healthcare in our countries and on the African Continent.

THANK YOU!

