

Dr Moretlo Molefi

Managing Director, Telemedicine Africa

Dr Moretlo Molefi is a medical doctor who says that she has always had an entrepreneurial mind. Born in Soweto, she grew up in Lesotho before obtaining a BSc degree in biology and chemistry. She then moved on to read for her Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery, at the Medical University of Southern Africa, where she qualified as a medical doctor.

In addition to working for a number of major pharmaceutical companies, Moretlo practiced as a community doctor before giving in to her entrepreneurial inclinations. With time, marrying her expertise as a medical doctor with her business sense, she became involved in telemedicine.

Her interest in telemedicine was cemented while serving as director for telemedicine research at the Medical Research Council (MRC) of South Africa for seven years. Its Telemedicine Unit was established as a joint project of the Department of Health and the MRC, and has gone a long way in delivering a solution to the severe problems of inadequate services and geographical challenges that face the South African health system. Moretlo was also the project leader in the development of the Telemedicine Workstation for developing countries.

Moretlo has pioneered ICT-based systems that support all levels of healthcare, including primary and tertiary healthcare. One example is a successful rural connectivity project on telemedicine in Limpopo. This project has now been extended to 14 regional hospitals covering the entire province.

She is working on a telehealth assessment project for telesurveillance in 14 Southern African countries, a project funded by the African Development Bank. She also coordinates international telemedicine training in China for at least 20 participants from developing countries, funded by the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology.

Her company, Telemedicine Africa, is pioneering a variety of telemedicine technologies supplied by Chinese company Yunnan Sunpa Image into Africa. "We are driven by the philosophy to provide integrated, multifunctional and scalable solutions and products to the continent. In fact, we developed the first system capable of transmitting real-time dynamic medical images via a standard voice-grade telephone line," she says.

Moretlo says that her success has been built on a solid work ethic, a belief in the power of technology, and an insistence that businesses must do good to do well. "Technology holds the key to unlocking solutions to many of the challenges we are facing in developing countries today, and our business is committed to making a positive contribution to the delivery of healthcare services to those who need it most.

"My dream is to create a virtual hospital where doctors from all over the world, including other African countries, can access our medical expertise. I have put in an application for funding from a local development bank, so I am hopeful of achieving my dream," she says, heading off to China for yet another telemedicine training session.

Her advice for other small business owners, other than embracing the power of technology, is to lead by example and be willing to tackle every task required of them by their business. "Funding is the key challenge for my business. It is critical that as much support as possible be given to entrepreneurs to be able to grow their ideas into sustainable ventures that can make a positive contribution to our country," she concludes.



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