

A Positive Diagnosis for the Health Care Sector

Mobility 2030



From 2008 to 2018, almost 135 000* deaths occurred on South African roads. The Road Accident Fund (RAF) reported that it settled and paid a total amount of R34.6 billion in claims during the 2017/18 financial period. Of that, R2.5 billion were medical payments. Loss-of-earnings and -support payments of R14.7 billion represented 57% of total compensation paid, and funeral costs, at R144 million represented 0.6% of total compensation paid in cash by the RAF. **It is clear that road safety in our country needs to be addressed. The direct impact of Autonomous Vehicles (AVs) on road safety might seem obvious, but Mobility 2030 could play a broader role in improving the health care sector. KPMG South Africa has unpacked a few possible scenarios.**

Healthier Statistics

A key benefit being touted for self-driving cars is that there will be less room for human error, thus fewer accidents. If drunk drivers were no longer at the wheel, they wouldn't be a risk to themselves and others. The same goes for drivers operating vehicles while tired. In an ideal world, this could mean a decrease in injuries and deaths on our roads, thus easing the burden on our healthcare system.

Autonomous Vehicles (AVs) could also assist health care professionals by collecting patients from outlying areas, which can help patients to keep their appointments. This is important, as missed appointments; often due to lack of transport, money or time; are significant drains on healthcare resources and can put patients' health in danger. AVs could also collect blood, urine or stool samples from patients, meaning they wouldn't have to travel to their doctor. AVs could also assist doctors doing their rounds. The trip from one hospital to another could become crucial rest time for busy health care professionals. They could switch off, relax or prepare for the next round of patient visits.

Safety and convenience aside, the introduction of Autonomous and Electric Vehicles could also have a positive effect on the quality of air we breathe. In densely populated areas, people are exposed to harmful vehicle emissions. Cleaner air means fewer people affected by pollution-related breathing problems and diseases. According to the FIA Foundation, outdoor air pollution is set to become the leading cause of environment-related child death by 2050. In 2016, the World Bank reported that air pollution kills approximately 20 000 South Africans a year, costing the economy almost R300-million.

A challenge South Africa faces is that EVs are quite expensive. In order to make a positive impact on the environment, there would need to be a large uptake of EVs on our roads. The same goes with Autonomous Vehicles. There is an issue around infrastructure and the cost implications.

Autonomous Ambulances

We have seen what AVs look like, but could you picture an autonomous ambulance? With a driverless ambulance, we'd imagine that there would be more room. A redesign could do away with the need for a cabin where a driver can sit, and see more space for paramedics to attend to a patient, while the ambulance navigates its way back to the hospital. While we're thinking ahead, autonomous emergency vehicles could potentially communicate with traffic lights. Instead of having to run a red light, the traffic light would receive data that an emergency vehicle was approaching and switch to green in time for them to pass through the intersection safely.

While this will almost certainly have a positive impact on health care, the introduction of Autonomous Vehicles in South Africa is far down the line. How else could Mobility 2030 positively affect health care?

Taking Health Care to New Heights

Drone delivery for medical supply distribution is currently being used in a couple of countries in Africa. As an example, a US-based company has been using fixed wing drones to deliver medical supplies to facilities in rural and outlying areas in Rwanda and Ghana. Patients in desperate need of medication or blood could wait up to 3 hours for it to arrive via courier, whereas a drone could deliver the life-saving parcel in 10 to 15 minutes. For drones to become a successful channel for medical supply distribution in South Africa, the drone operators would need to work closely with government to iron out regulatory issues and ensure that it is rolled out correctly.

Conclusion

While Mobility 2030 won't address all issues facing the health care sector in South Africa at the moment, it could definitely have a positive impact on our people. It's up to big business and government to pre-empt and investigate the opportunities that lie ahead. KPMG South Africa is ready to advise on Mobility 2030 and probe the possibilities.

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