



ASAIPA Smart Health Summit 2026

Purpose in Practice: Rationalising Healthcare AI for Better Patient Care

The ASAIPA Smart Health Summit 2026, the fourth annual edition of this flagship healthcare technology convention, once again brought together healthcare leaders, innovators, clinicians, policymakers and technology experts from across South Africa and beyond to explore one of the most significant developments shaping modern healthcare—Artificial Intelligence (AI). Convened by ASAIPA CEO, Dr Unben Pillay, together with Rebel Element, this year's summit was hosted under the inspiring theme:

"Purpose in Practice"

The central objective of the summit was clear—to move beyond the overwhelming noise surrounding Artificial Intelligence and instead focus on practical discussions around its meaningful application in everyday healthcare delivery.

With more than 500 delegates representing every sector of healthcare attending the event at the Vodacom World Events Centre in Midrand, the summit demonstrated why Smart Health Africa continues to be one of the continent's leading platforms for healthcare innovation and collaboration.

What is Smart Health Africa?

Smart Health Africa is where innovation meets impact, driving the future of sustainable healthcare across the African continent. As the global healthcare community works towards achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), sustainability remains at the forefront of healthcare transformation. Smart Health Africa creates a platform where visionary leaders, healthcare professionals, digital health experts, innovators and strategists come together to develop practical solutions that redefine healthcare delivery throughout Africa.

Rather than focusing solely on emerging technologies, the summit challenges delegates to explore how innovation can create measurable improvements in healthcare access, patient outcomes, efficiency and sustainability.

Purpose in Practice

In keeping with this year's theme, the overriding message delivered throughout the summit was simple yet powerful:

The true measure of technological innovation lies not in its design—but in its delivery. Artificial Intelligence should not exist simply because it is innovative. Instead, it should solve real clinical problems, improve healthcare delivery and support healthcare professionals while maintaining the human connection that remains at the heart of patient care.

Throughout the conference, speakers repeatedly reinforced that technology must support clinicians—not replace them.

The Questions That Matter

Many of the presentations centred around several critical questions facing healthcare today:

- How do we embed innovation into real healthcare systems?
- How do we integrate innovation into policy and everyday clinical behaviour?
- How do we ensure the technologies we develop are not only adopted, but successfully adapted, scaled and sustained?
- How do we ensure healthcare practitioners remain central to the development of digital health solutions?

These discussions formed the foundation of meaningful conversations around responsible AI implementation within healthcare systems.

Opening Fireside Chat

The summit opened with an engaging Fireside Chat and internationally recognised health technology innovator Dr Simon Kos from Heidi Health. Dr Kos challenged delegates to consider how healthcare capacity across the world could potentially be doubled without dehumanising healthcare. One of the strongest messages from this discussion was the importance of understanding clinical workflows before introducing technological solutions.

The panel stressed that healthcare professionals must play an active role in designing and implementing AI technologies. Successful innovation can only occur when clinicians are directly involved in shaping tools that genuinely improve patient care.

The consensus was clear:

Use Artificial Intelligence to advance strategic healthcare objectives—not simply for the sake of innovation.

Improving Healthcare Access Through AI

Later in the programme, Dr Unben Pillay led an insightful discussion on the role of AI in improving healthcare access.

A fundamental question was posed:

"Have we been guided by healthcare practitioners?"

This simple question underscored one of the summit's recurring themes—that technology should always be driven by clinical need.

Key considerations discussed included:

- Building trust across the healthcare ecosystem
- Transparency in AI decision-making
- Appropriate governance and accountability
- Security and patient privacy
- Regulatory compliance
- Continuous learning and improvement
- Ensuring high-impact clinical decisions remain safe and evidence-based

Speakers also highlighted the importance of balancing sophisticated technological capabilities with practical functionality. As several presenters noted, healthcare does not always require ultra-intelligent systems—it often simply requires solutions that work effectively and safely.

Governance Remains Essential

Across multiple sessions, delegates agreed that robust governance remains fundamental to successful AI implementation. Healthcare regulators, policymakers, technology developers and industry leaders must continue working together to establish a mature regulatory framework that supports innovation while protecting patients.

One of the most memorable messages echoed throughout the summit reflected the enduring ethical principle that underpins healthcare:
"In the meantime, do no harm."

World-Class Keynote Speakers

The Smart Health Summit 2026 featured an outstanding line-up of local and international keynote speakers who shared practical insights into the future of healthcare innovation.

Amber Vodegel
Founder & CEO, 28X

Presentation:

Health Intelligence Without the Cloud: On-Device AI as Infrastructure for the Underserved
Amber Vodegel explored how on-device Artificial Intelligence has the potential to transform healthcare delivery in underserved communities by reducing dependence on cloud infrastructure while improving accessibility and resilience.

Dinesh Govender
CEO, Discovery Vitality

Presentation:

From Devices to Decisions: How Data, AI & Wearables Are Shaping the Future of Health
Dinesh Govender demonstrated how wearable technologies, advanced analytics and AI are enabling more proactive, personalised and preventative healthcare, empowering both patients and healthcare providers to make better-informed decisions.

Sincerely,
ASAIPA Communication Department

Ming Tang
Former Chief Data & Analytics Officer, NHS England

Presentation:

Accelerating Digital Transformation at Scale

International keynote speaker Ming Tang shared valuable lessons from the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS), highlighting the importance of leadership, governance, collaboration and strategic implementation when scaling digital transformation across complex healthcare systems.

Looking Ahead

The Smart Health Summit 2026 reaffirmed that Artificial Intelligence is no longer a future concept—it is becoming an integral part of modern healthcare.

However, the summit also reinforced that technology alone cannot transform healthcare. Real transformation occurs when innovation is guided by clinicians, supported by sound governance, aligned with patient-centred care and implemented with purpose.

For healthcare practitioners, the message was both encouraging and reassuring: Artificial Intelligence should enhance clinical excellence, strengthen decision-making and improve patient outcomes—while preserving the compassion, trust and professionalism that remain the foundation of quality healthcare.

ASAIPA extends its sincere appreciation to all speakers, delegates, exhibitors, sponsors and partners who contributed to another highly successful Smart Health Summit. Together, we continue shaping a smarter, more sustainable and patient-centred future for healthcare across South Africa and the African continent.

To review memories of the Smart Health Summit kindly click on the link below:
<https://smarthealthsummit.com/>

Sincerely,
ASAIPA Communication Department

