

Digital women's health and wellness clinic - created by women, for women of Africa

 By [Katja Hamilton](#)

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Give women their time and money back by bringing virtual consultations, medication delivery, free and instant access to healthcare resources within their reach.



Source: Supplied. Thato Mabudusha Schermer, co-founder and chief executive officer at Zoie Health.

Harness technology to provide and mainstream supportive online communities that destigmatise women's health issues.

This is what is going to change the healthcare space significantly, says Thato Mabudusha Schermer, co-founder and chief executive officer at Zoie Health.

Shaking things up, Schermer and Dr Nonie Sitole launched Zoie Health Technologies last year, with the initiative already raking in huge awards among them the Harvard Africa Business Club 'New Venture Forum Venture Competition' and the AlphaCode, it also took honours at the Women in Tech pitch dinner.

The duo decided to pool their knowledge, with Thato drawing on her years of experience in business development, technology and strategy across several of South Africa's major healthcare organisations and technology companies, and Sitole applying the insights she obtained while studying towards a PhD in genetics and molecular biology, with a special focus on cervical cancer.

An all-in-one women's health digital clinic, Zoie provides women with access to affordable, definitive and helpful healthcare at every phase of their lives. Aimed at serving Africa's 500 million women, it offers a holistic portal that includes much-needed support for family planning, fertility, maternity and beyond.

One-stop reproductive-health services for all

From virtual consultations with experts in fertility, doctors who can help with a UTI or supply emergency contraception and nutritional advice, to receiving support and advice from an online community of pregnant and first-time moms, Zoie's services are available the minute you download the app.

More recently, Zoie launched MyContraceptive®, an online contraceptive service available to women countrywide.

MyContraceptive users are able to order their contraceptive in a few easy steps. They can book a 15-minute virtual consult with one of Zoie Health's healthcare practitioners, consult virtually, then receive their script by means of email and subscribe for monthly delivery of their contraceptive, should they choose.



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"We realised that although there is a lot of innovation in the medical space, there was no one focusing on one key customer: women," said Schermer.

Currently, not enough work is being done to allow access to healthcare in South Africa, Schermer added.

"We see that healthcare for women and families is lacking in many respects. Many women need to take full days off work in order to spend hours at the clinic picking up their contraception or to get a pregnancy scan, for example.

"Visits to private gynaecologists are often too expensive for many women (even with medical aid) and a lack of education leaves gaps in healthcare for women.

"Without routine check-ups, women's conditions like HPV and certain STDs can go untreated, which leads to greater consequences for health and fertility later down the road. Zoie is helping bridge the gap between women and healthcare by offering virtual consultations, chats with registered health professionals and our contraception delivery service.



Source: Thato Schermer and Dr Nonie Sitole, founders of Zoie Health Technologies.

"What we particularly like about MyContraceptive is that users save time and money by avoiding waiting at the doctor's offices, clinic queues and at the pharmacy. They have access to qualified and licensed healthcare practitioners at convenient times for them and avoid paying expensive doctor fees for a script," said Schermer.

"Other benefits include discreet monthly delivery of their contraceptive to their chosen location and automatic prescription renewals with no long-term commitment – users can cancel anytime.

"The Zoie Health offering has been thoughtfully designed to take an integrated holistic view of women's health and wellness, based around a community of women who support each other through the key stages of life."

Zoie Health practises what it preaches: the company not only looks after its customers, but its staff too.

"We've just conducted surveys in order to produce the first annual Women@Work Report - a look at how women are being supported in corporate environments. Our findings show that there's a lot more companies can be doing.

"Many women indicated that it's important for them to have support in the form of flexible working hours to be with their family.

"Women asked for formal spaces to express breast milk and leave for menstruation.

"These are important avenues for companies to explore, since women not only make 80 to 90% of the healthcare decisions for their households but are also immensely productive and valuable for companies.

"We know that companies with women who hold positions in the C-suite do better than those without. We need to create environments that support women."

Growing support for women at work

Zoie Health is made up of female employees.

Said Schermer: "We've launched Zoie Health for Business, which offers the Zoie platform to women through their corporate benefits. In this way, companies are able to show support for their female employees and their families by making access to healthcare easier.

"We offer additional support in the form of self-care days where employees are able to take a day off a month and engage in a form of self-care.

"Imagine a world where all organisations consider providing their female employees premium membership of the Zoie app.

"Ensuring that the women that work in your organisation have access to affordable and convenient healthcare services and

resources will improve the general quality of their lives, which is good for them and good for you, because they can not only be great mothers, sisters, partners because of it, but they will also be great team members," Schermer added.



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Access to technology is definitely going to be a game changer for women across the world, as will seeing more women in key decision-making positions in the healthcare industry.

"This will really allow for medical research to focus more on women's health so that medication and healthcare services can be more accommodative of the everyday woman.

"At Zoie Health, we are working everyday to provide women with access to affordable, convenient and caring healthcare because we believe that when women receive the care they deserve, they are more likely to lead more fulfilling lives."

Both Schermer and Sitole were nominated for Standard Bank's Top Women and made it onto the Tech Cabal's list of 11 rising female founders. Schermer was named one of Mail & Guardian's 200 Young South Africans. Sitole received a nomination for a STEM award in the Womandla women awards.

ABOUT KATJA HAMILTON

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