

# Dawie Roodt's radical idea: Eliminate the need for a doctor prescriptions for certain medicines

*By Staff Writer*

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South Africa should eliminate the need for a doctor's prescription for certain medicines, which is appropriate in the age of AI and self-diagnosis.

This is the view of award-winning economist Dawie Roodt, who said there are better ways than National Health Insurance (NHI) to make medical care affordable.

Although his comments date back to 2024, they have aged well, especially in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and online access to medical information.

Thirty years ago, doctors and specialists were the only source of information when people had a medical problem.

Ordinary South Africans did not have access to medical information, which means that trained medical professionals were crucial in making decisions.

This changed dramatically with the advent of the Internet, which put valuable medical information in people's hands.

Artificial intelligence significantly improved self-diagnosis and, in many cases, outperformed doctors and specialists.

Recent research indicates that several AI systems, particularly multimodal large language models (MLLMs), have reached a superhuman tier in diagnostic accuracy.

These systems frequently outperformed both general practitioners and specialists in structured benchmarks.

A landmark 2026 study benchmarked AI against a massive dataset of 16.4 million physician responses.

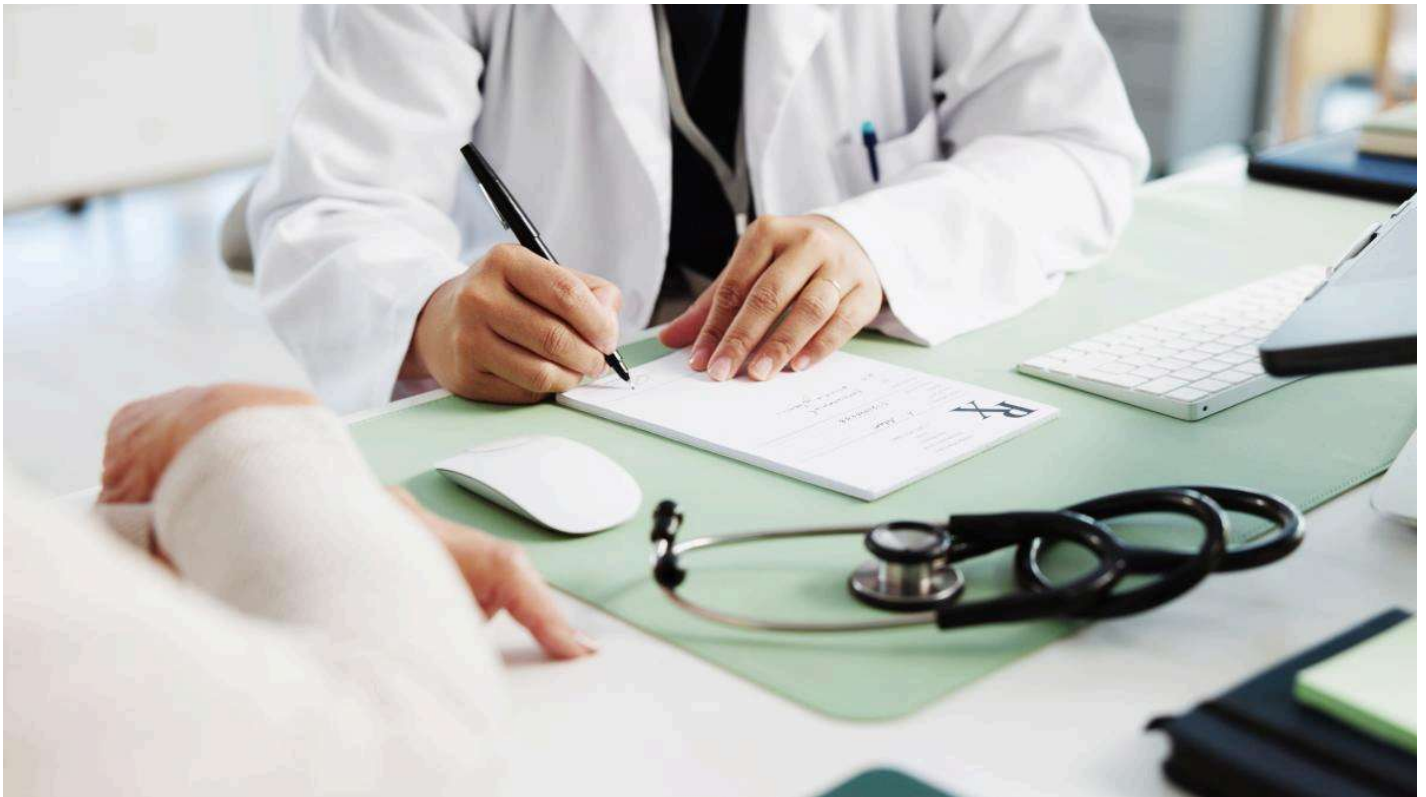
The results showed that all tested multimodal LLMs significantly outperformed the global physician collective.

Claude, for example, achieved a diagnostic accuracy of 89.0%, compared to the physician majority vote of 46.7%.

This means that people with Internet access can perform accurate medical diagnoses based on symptoms and related information.

Although it is still advisable to see a doctor or specialist in most cases, AI has changed the game in the medical field.

## **Dawie Roodt's view on medical prescriptions**



To make healthcare more affordable in South Africa, Roodt proposed creating three medical aids and lowering the barrier of entry for private healthcare.

It includes transforming the Department of Health into three medical aid companies and forcing all South Africans to have a medical aid plan.

“The private healthcare sector in South Africa has far too much protection. It is a bunch of cliques that make a tremendous amount of money,” he said.

The country must proactively lower the quality standards required to provide private healthcare services, allowing more people to enter the system.

He explained that a simple way to start the process is to eliminate the need for a doctor’s prescription for certain medicines.

Currently, people must visit a doctor, which is very expensive, to get access to a wide range of medicines.

People should be able to take responsibility for their own lives by visiting a pharmacist and buying the medicine they believe they need.

The idea that only a doctor can prescribe medicine has been entrenched in society. However, it does not make sense.

There is no reason why people should not have control over the medicine they consume, as it is their health which is on the line.

Artificial intelligence systems can provide a full diagnosis and the medicines required, which gives people the power to address their own medical needs.

If they are uncertain, they can still visit a doctor for a second opinion on whether it is the best route to follow.

## **Online medical prescriptions**



Online medical prescriptions have started to emerge in South Africa, which is a step towards giving people the right to buy medicine without seeing a doctor.

Although these online platforms are still staffed by qualified doctors, they are much cheaper and more convenient than visiting a doctor's practice.

However, it remains a grey area. The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) gives clear guidelines on online prescriptions.

Issuing a prescription based solely on an online questionnaire without a proper clinical evaluation is considered a breach of professional ethics.

In the case of virtual consultations, they must meet the same standard of care as an in-person visit.

If a physical examination is necessary to make a diagnosis, a prescription should not be issued until that examination occurs.

It added that an established doctor-patient relationship should ideally exist, though the HPCSA has become more flexible on this.

This means that a doctor must still spend time talking to the patient, which adds costs to getting a prescription for medicine.