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Congo's Ebola Outbreak Highlights Dire Need To Improve Healthcare Supply Chains, Says Professional Body

The vaccine distribution challenges being faced by role players currently racing to prevent an Ebola epidemic in the Congo highlight the increasingly critical need for improvements in Africa's healthcare supply chains, according to Mungo Park, president of SAPICS – the Professional Body for Supply Chain Management.

This is the Democratic Republic of Congo's ninth Ebola outbreak since the disease was identified in the 1970s. The World Health Organization (WHO) has announced that it will deploy an experimental Ebola vaccine called ZMapp to halt the outbreak. Because this vaccine must be stored at -60 to -80 degrees Celsius, an efficient, uninterrupted cold chain is crucial to ensure the vaccine remains effective.

“Heat, humidity, language barriers and poor infrastructure in remote areas have been cited by the WHO as some of the challenges in getting the vaccine where it is needed. While this experimental Ebola vaccine has especially testing, ultra-cold storage requirements, the reality is that logistics challenges like this are an ongoing daily struggle for healthcare providers, governments, international donors, non-governmental organisations and humanitarian aid groups distributing life-saving medicines and healthcare supplies to vulnerable people and communities around Africa,” Park states. He says that SAPICS hopes that the awareness created by the obstacles being faced in this Ebola crisis will put the spotlight on the dire need to improve African healthcare supply chains and distribution networks for everything from life-saving medications for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, to antibiotics, contraception, circumcision kits and humanitarian supplies for refugees.

“The difficulties faced to get the Ebola vaccine where it is needed without delay and without compromising its effectiveness are making global headlines because they relate

to one of the world's most deadly, high profile diseases; but is estimated that \$20 million is wasted annually from poor refrigeration of vaccines, and up to 35% of vaccines are affected by improper storage."

Park stresses that the robust, reliable supply chains that are critical for positive health outcomes require a skilled, knowledgeable supply chain workforce. *"Since its foundation in 1966, SAPICS has become the leading provider of knowledge in supply chain management, production and operations in Southern Africa, offering superior education and training, internationally recognised certifications, comprehensive resources and a country-wide network of accomplished industry professionals,"* he explains. This network is ever expanding and now includes associates in other African countries.

SAPICS has recently been appointed a board member of *"People that Deliver"*, a global partnership of organisations focusing on the professionalisation of supply chain personnel and training of professionals to manage health supply chains. Its other board members include USAID (United States Agency for International Development), UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and The Global Fund (The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria), as well as academic institutions like MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). *"This is one of the avenues through which we aim to contribute to the global drive to develop and professionalise public health supply chains in order to improve access to critical medicines and save lives,"* Park expands.

In line with SAPICS's recognition of the need to optimise healthcare supply chains, the association has lined up several specialists in this area for its annual conference, which takes place next month, Park says. This year's event marks four decades of bringing supply chain professionals from around the world together, and more than 850 supply chain practitioners will converge in Cape Town from 10 to 13 June to expand their knowledge and network. *"Healthcare focused presentations include humanitarian supply chain learnings from Jordan, which has for many decades been a hub for logistics relief activities in the Middle East, especially during crises in neighbouring Palestine, Iraq and Syria. We are providing a platform for People that Deliver and the National Medical*

Supply Fund of Sudan to share the success of their collaboration in Sudan. A powerful case study will show how effective lean management streamlines patient care, while a panel discussion featuring thought leaders from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Africa Resource Centre examines why the public and private health sectors should be working together to improve the delivery of life-saving medicines to vulnerable communities and patients.

“More than half the world’s population lacks access to the most basic health services, and in many developing countries, people are dying because of inefficient supply chains. This is a global emergency,” Park concludes.

The 2018 SAPICS Conference takes place in Cape Town, from 10 to 13 June. For further information, or to register, call 011 023 6701 or email info@sapics.org.za. Up-to-the-minute information is also posted on the SAPICS conference website:

<https://conference.sapics.org>

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Since its foundation in 1966, SAPICS has become the leading provider of knowledge in supply chain management, production and operations in Southern Africa.

SAPICS builds operations management excellence in individuals and enterprises through superior education and training, internationally recognised certifications, comprehensive resources and a country-wide network of accomplished industry professionals. This network is ever expanding and now includes associates in other African countries. SAPICS is proud to represent APICS (the global end-to-end supply chain association) as its exclusive premier channel partner in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Established 40 years ago, the annual SAPICS Conference is the leading event in Africa for supply chain professionals. The 2018 SAPICS Conference takes place in Cape Town, from 10 to 13 June.