Africa imported medical equipment & supplies valued at just over US$3.2 billion in 2010. This was a rise of 4.9% over 2009. Growth in imported medical products has been strong over the past few years, with a CAGR of 7.5% for the 2006-10 period. But continental figures disguise wide variations in spending and health provision: opportunities exist, yes, but where?

According to a new Espicom report, ***The African Medical Market Fact Book 2012*** , many countries of Africa present significant opportunities for the manufacturers of medical devices and equipment.

For many medical equipment exporters, Africa is not a region they take seriously. The huge gulf between the more valuable markets of South Africa, Egypt and Nigeria and their vastly poorer neighbours has tarnished the whole continent. But that view fails to take into account those markets whose imports of medical equipment in % terms are far greater than in the US or Europe, albeit from a low base.

Northern Africa, comprising five of Africa's wealthiest countries, accounted for just over US$1.1 billion in 2010, equal to 34.6% of the total. These markets will have suffered due to the instability in the region in 2011, but underlying demand is strong. In contrast, the countries of central Africa have struggled to make the necessary investment and imports have fallen. Southern Africa, dominated by South Africa, represents the largest and most developed market, but Egypt, Nigeria, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya all represent US$100 billion medical import markets.

There is a near total reliance on imported products. Only a handful of countries have any noticeable capacity to manufacture even the most basic items, and even these are reliant on imports for upwards of 90% of their requirements. Elsewhere, the figure rises to 100%.

Not all countries have a jaundiced view of Africa as a marketplace. China in the past few years has been a major supplier of medical equipment. With one eye on protecting its strategic mineral interests, China has been keen to give financial assistance to governments across the continent.

Andrew Crofts, senior health analyst at Espicom and the report's author comments "Africa is a continent of the "have's" and "have nots". Those with mineral resources and stable governments are using the wealth to improve the health of their populations. In contrast countries such as Somalia and Chad are among the poorest in the world with only the most basic facilities in limited supply. Manufacturers need to identify the countries which offer the best prospects and understand the operating environment".

For further information on the report please visit www.espicom.com/afrpr .

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