

## Out of the Comfort Zone

**For hospitals, it is a „Time of Change“ and there is an increasing need for leading physicians to come to terms with making a „Paradigm-Shift“ in the way that they lead in a much changing hospital environment. Also it is time to reflect on what new skills are needed to stay ahead in a more competitive hospital environment. This change from the traditional „Comfort Zone“ will not always be easy!**

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**Hospitals in Switzerland are going through a „Time of Change“. This is being driven by a number of key factors, including increased competition between hospitals, SwissDRG and importantly the changing expectations of both patients and medical staff. This is further emphasised by the ongoing government/public debate on increasing costs in the health system and the need for a more transparent understanding of both hospital patient and financial performance. In addition there is improving technology allowing for new and better treatments for patients. All of these factors combine to increase the need for more „total business ownership“ in hospitals, thus further challenging leading physicians to re-examine their roles whilst still ensuring that the correct level of attention is given to the patient.**

The traditional role and maybe „comfort zone“ for leading physicians has been generally to maximise their day with patients. They take active responsibility through consulting, operating and the recovery processes to ensure that patients are getting the correct care and necessary course of action for their particular condition. At the same time, they are expected to keep up-to-date with the latest surgical developments, processes and related ethical quality and safety standards. In addition there is the daily management of the team, which also involves guaranteeing the continuing professional development of less experienced doctors. This overall leadership role is demanding and to an extent focuses on „technical daily management“. But it is debatable whether it takes into account all of the new leadership demands of a changing hospital environment.

### Different Hats

In the new hospital world, physicians should not just wear a „doctor's hat“! They need to take on different roles and wear various new hats as the pressures of business ownership grow. This means developing a much broader view of the overall hospital business. At times they will need to act and think a little bit like a CFO, sometimes like a sales and marketing leader, other times like a HR manager or perhaps a strategic planner or even a production manager! All of these roles need different skills and some significant level of personal commitment to ensure the expectations of a changing hospital world are successfully met.

For example the new demands include leaders having a better understanding of the financial performance and efficiency of the different clinics. Plus they should want to have access to transparent economic performance at the individual patient care level. This increasing economic focus is an impor-

tant element for physicians as they look to balance future patient activity with available resources and budgets. Economic performance at both SwissDRG and clinic level needs to be transparent and understood so that „best practices“ in good performing units are visible and adaptable by less performing units.

### More market focus

The days of hospitals waiting for patients to appear and be cared for are long gone. The market has become more competitive and patients have a wider and more proactive knowledge of hospital capabilities and treatment possibilities. Patients expect to be treated quickly and competently with both modern medicine and high standards. For the patient the emotional connection to the house doctor, the specialist and the hospital is very important. Developing these positive relationships is key and this needs to come together in a uniform hospital motto „the patient is king“. The physician must have a good working and active network with house doctors, other hospitals and specialists. The full capabilities of the hospital/clinics must be clear so that the hospital is marketed properly to house doctors and other hospitals. Good networking by the physician can also identify weaknesses in hospital/house doctor/patient processes. This can be a catalyst for important improvements in hospital performance and better service for the patient.

The working expectations of doctors and nurses are also changing. The old „24/7 standard“ is no longer a realistic work model and many of the new generation medical staff are looking for a different „work-life balance“. Flexibility in terms of working days, working hours, part-time work, weekend and night work are all subjects for discussion in the changing hospital landscape. In addition the new generation of doctors expect to develop quicker and take more responsibility at an earlier age. This is further supported by the continuing technological advancements, operational platforms and clearer medical standards. For leading physicians it means there is a need to spend more time with the medical team and be clear on career planning, whilst empowering young doctors earlier with the related personal skills development. A more effective and timely progression of young doctors is a clear opportunity for patients and hospitals. It supports improved patient handling as well as increases hospital productivity. It can free up some of the senior physician's time for new activities. However, more flexible working hours for the medical staff combined with reduced patient hospitalisation time will create new challenges in terms of more complex scheduling for operations and patient handling. It is again an evolving new challenge for senior physicians.



**You have to plan better**

The vision for future hospitals is also a very relevant theme today. Senior physicians will have to play their part in the strategic planning process to ensure there is properly balanced decision making in terms of new investments for patient treatments, technology and anticipated hospital trends. This cannot be left simply to the financial and corporate leaders of the hospital. It is very important that our future hospitals are developed in line with patient needs and that doctors are fully involved in this process. Linked to this is the need to reflect on what changes are required in the organisation and which new skills should be focused on by the senior physician and his team. For example is there the right young talent in the organisation to meet the future hospital needs? The message for hospitals and senior physicians is very clear - plan better and focus on „total business ownership“ to stay ahead in a more competitive hospital world. The key is to ensure ethical standards in regard to the needs of the patients without making compromises.

Above are a few examples of where senior physicians need to come to terms with the challenge of making a „paradigm-shift“ in the way they both lead their clinics and also allocate their time to deal with the new hospital environment. A paradigm-shift is the ability to see one's own world in a different

way. It typically means a change in behaviour and also a change in priorities. A paradigm-shift requires new thinking and a new focus. Its effect can help doctors and hospitals to continue to progress and not just stand still in an ever changing world. But of course it also means leaving the „comfort zone“ and experiencing new things which is not always easy or nice! It typically means rethinking in terms of values and the vision for everyone involved. This wider role for senior physicians also means more attention to EQ (emotional intelligence) skills and not just the dependence on traditional IQ knowledge based skills. To be successful with networking, personal coaching and visionary leadership there is a clear requirement for above average social competence. This allows one to identify easily with customers, employees, key decision makers and influencers.

There are clearly interesting and challenging times ahead for hospitals and in particular for senior physicians. Those who can identify early with the need to change and make the necessary „paradigm-shift“ will have the best chance of being successful in this new and more demanding hospital environment. Leaving the traditional „comfort-zone“ is never easy but history has proven that those who can adapt quickest usually have the advantage of a clear competitive edge!

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