

Volume 13, Issue 5/2011 - Editorial

Solidarity - Now More Than Ever

As I write these lines, many are worried about the cohesion of Europe. Several European summits were necessary to arrange for the long-term support of a few Member States. However, even if these measures taken by the Ministers of the European Council were to be efficiently implemented, Member States should nevertheless prepare for more turbulence ahead. Drastic cost-cutting packages are announced in most countries, and hospitals are already getting their first distinct taste of just how difficult and risky their implementation is.

"Leading Change in Challenging Times" – this was the banner headline chosen by the Health Management Institute (HMI), our Irish sister association, for its first annual meeting. We will be publishing some of the most interesting contributions in upcoming editions of (E)Hospital. How to cut costs without compromising the quality of the health services offered was the fundamental question at the heart of all contributions. Remarkably, our Irish colleagues also turned to expertise from the European mainland in their search for answers. Speaking amongst other colleagues from the United Kingdom, Heinz Kölking, President of the EAHM, stressed the fact that even in countries not so badly affected by the current crisis, cost-cutting is still very much on the daily agenda. Regarding German hospitals, he illustrated the balancing act between cutting costs and ensuring quality, made possible by an adaptable corporate culture. Regarding this particular form of management we would like to refer our readers to this issue's leadership cover story with articles from Prof. Malik and Sue Hodgetts.

Apart from their valuable content, these contributions also symbolise the idea of solidarity. Solidarity is a fundamental requirement in the process of growing closer together, not only in times of crisis. This is true on a global scale, for Europe, for European institutions, for our own countries – and it is also true for hospital managers. Learning about the difficulties a neighbour might face, helping them to find a solution, employing their knowledge and experience without lapsing into presumptuousness... in short, benchmarking aimed at values is an adequate tool, but it is also an expression of solidarity.

It is my firm belief that hospitals should remain places of solidarity par excellence. The funding systems of public health and therefore of hospitals are currently already based on the principle of solidarity. All insured persons have with equal financial contributions, a right to treatment and care that adequately treats their medical condition. We know that solidarity is often questioned. For instance, several statutory health insurances are considering passing costly treatment onto private insurances; likewise, some hospitals are contemplating cutting loss-making treatments from their list of offered services. If patients really and truly are at the centre of all acts within our hospitals, such practices should be seen as highly questionable.

In managing our institutions we experience this solidarity on a daily basis; within a team of workers, within and between different professions. And solidarity is the precondition to find common ground for our goals.

Solidarity must be a value to be lived by, and this is also true for the EAHM. Against the background of the financial crisis of their country, our Greek colleagues are doing their utmost to organise the 24th EAHM Congress in Athens 2012. At the moment the risks are not fully calculable, and we have to carefully examine the prerequisites needed to guarantee the smooth running of the congress. The Board of the EAHM has decided to support our Greek colleagues with this task. We will present the results to the Executive Committee in Dusseldorf, who will then make a final decision. We are making all efforts to not only realistically assess the risks but to also include solidarity as a basic principle into this difficult decision-making process. We explain our decision and the process behind it more closely in the "Letter from the President", which all members will receive in December and which will also be available on our website. It is more than just an educated guess that solidarity, greater than ever before, will be required from each and everyone of us, in order to ensure a promising future.

Willy Heuschen

EAHM Secretary General and Editor-in-Chief

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