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Hospital Rises to the Challenge

Battling the coronavirus is part of everyday operations at Munich's Rechts der Isar Hospital.



"The state government instructed us to ensure sufficient treatment capacities under all circumstances," says Frank. The hospital had already made plans back in February to take steps such as increasing the number of ICU beds. "If needed, we can crank up our capacities relatively quickly," she adds.

That being said, the hospital is not in the most advantageous position to handle the upcoming challenges. "Digitalization could be a big help to us—if we already had a state-of-the-art system in place," says Frank. Yet she also notes that efforts to digitalize are gaining momentum. "To a certain extent, Covid-19 is giving us the impetus to catch up," she remarks. Roman Hipp, the Senior Partner at Porsche Consulting in charge of the health sector, views the Munich facility as representative of many large hospitals. "Triggered by the pandemic, hospitals are introducing more digital technologies at faster rates in order to support their personnel and provide the best possible care for their patients. Those that had already instituted smart strategies now have a clear head start," he says. Another important task at present is to harness this momentum and build networks. "Hospitals will not be able to advance digitalization on their own," says Hipp. "To derive the greatest benefits from digital ways of serving patients, companies in the medical technology and pharmaceutical sectors will need to add their own expertise to the mix, as will start-ups and investors." Specialized future-oriented conferences such as the Digital Health Summit at the Technical University of Munich are well suited to forge connections among key players in the healthcare field—with the shared aim of promoting digital innovations.

Weaknesses are becoming evident

At Rechts der Isar Hospital, the extraordinary circumstances are prompting changes not only in technology but also with respect to human resources. "Our employees are helping out wherever they're needed," says the commercial director. This level of interdisciplinary collaboration was hardly imaginable in the past. But Frank also notes that the response to the virus has revealed some weaknesses. For one thing, individual departments at the hospital still have different processes. That affects not only patient management but also areas like surgical processes and sterile goods management. "We'll have to work together to standardize our processes in the future," she says.

Initial steps have already been taken. In 2019, the hospital worked together with Porsche Consulting to define management guidelines

and to strategically realign commercial organizational structures. "The improved processes are all the more helpful to us right now," says Frank. "Take the twenty-five process and transformation facilitators who were trained over the course of those projects. Some of them are providing useful structural recommendations at our crisis management sessions, which are laying the best possible groundwork for the decisions we need to make. That is of great help to the board of management."

Dr. Frank is pleased to see the expressions of appreciation for hospitals and their employees. "I hope it continues, and also that everyone from custodians and cleaning personnel to front-line providers like nursing teams and physicians regain a sharper awareness of their respective roles. That could lead to a new view of healthcare in general." For that to happen, however, all the healthcare-related professions and occupations would need to make use of the opportunities provided by this new level of appreciation. The commercial director has some doubts as to whether that will in fact occur. "However, I do believe that this situation will lead to some positive developments overall for hospitals."

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