



# Bait in the form of IT Solutions

**Personnel is becoming scarce in Germany's clinics – especially in rural areas. State-of-the-art IT equipment will make working at Heinsberg Municipal Hospital more attractive for specialists and physicians.**

COPY — Silke Kilz

**C**ost pressures, lack of personnel and compounding documentation requirements are part of everyday life in German hospitals. This is no different in the Heinsberg Municipal Hospital, an academic teaching hospital of RWTH Aachen University. For this reason, the institution has been relying on the consistent digitalization of its processes for several years now. And it is way ahead of the rest, because the degree of IT implementation in German hospitals still leaves much to be desired in an international comparison. According to the 2019 Hospital Report from the Scientific Institute of the AOK (WIdO), Germany is about 40 percent below the European average. Countries such as the Netherlands or Denmark are much better positioned.

What could be the cause of this? In addition to the lack of a culture of innovation in numerous institutions, many decision makers fail to recognize the benefits of investing in modern hospital information systems (HIS). In Heinsberg, on the other hand, the HIS iMedOne is at the center of digitalization: instead of paper and pen, physicians and nurses in Heinsberg have their iPad Mini in their coat pockets and thus have mobile access to laboratory results, diagnostics and other patient data throughout the entire hospital. Doctors discuss examination reports or X-ray images directly at the patient's bedside. In addition, they prescribe medication or dictate the progress of wound healing on-site into the system, where it automatically reaches the electronic documentation service.

## **DON'T MAKE FALSE ECONOMIES**

For Jörg Neidig, IT manager of the Heinsberg Municipal Hospital, the hesitant use of a HIS is incomprehensible: "Anyone who does without a modern HIS today is making

false economies." And this, despite the fact that his facility with 187 beds and around 500 employees is not exactly one of the largest hospitals in Germany. "The documentation duties of physicians and nursing staff continue to grow," adds Heinz-Gerd Schröders, Managing Director of the hospital. Without electronic support, this effort would no longer be manageable. If there is to be enough time for the patient, there is no alternative other than a good HIS, even for a small clinic. "Otherwise we would need significantly more doctors, nurses and office staff. From a financial standpoint, this would not be possible."

Heinsberger's experience shows that technical equipment also plays an important role in recruiting. "Young physicians in particular expect modern technology to support their daily work processes," says Schröders. In times of a worsening shortage of skilled workers, this is an essential focus: according to a recent study by management consultants Roland Berger, hospital managers in Germany wish to expand with around 30,000 nursing jobs by the end of the year. According to the hospital study, however, in 2018, only around 11,000 specialists were looking for a job. "It goes without saying, therefore, that our job postings should also advertise our modern IT system. For many specialists, this is a reason to apply for a job at Heinsberg Hospital despite the rural location."

## **THE APP IS A SURE-FIRE SUCCESS**

When the Heinsberg hospital decided on a fitting HIS, the stability of the solution was the most important factor. "For a hospital of our size, the system must also be manageable with a small IT team," says Jörg Neidig. At least as important is the modular structure of the system. "We didn't have to make a large investment all at once but were able to successively introduce the care unit workstation, outpatient

workstation, OR planning and service facility management modules." In addition, the individual modules allowed precise scaling to the respective needs of the hospital. The HIS can thus be expanded at any time.

For some time now, the team from Heinsberg has been working with the mobile version of the HIS – much to the delight of the hospital staff. "The mobile version was a success right from the start," recalls Jörg Neidig. It can be intuitively operated, and the training effort is low which saves the hospital a lot of time and money. "Previously, for example, we had used digital cameras for wound documentation," reports the IT expert. Afterwards, the photos had to be uploaded to a computer and deleted from the camera. Today, the nursing staff take the pictures directly from the patient's bedside with the iPad, so that they are automatically saved under wound documentation. "Once you've tried this, you won't want to do without mobile support anymore."

### CODING EXPERTS ON ROUNDS

In the meantime, other professional groups in the hospital as well as doctors and nurses are benefiting from digitalization. Physiotherapists are now documenting their services with the mobile HIS. The hospital's coding specialists also use the app. Instead of recording the services of the doctors and nurses at their desks as before then preparing them for billing with the health insurance companies by means of flat rates per case, the specialists are simply hard on the doctors' heels. The advantage: you can record all services directly via iPad during the rounds. "We work faster and better today," emphasizes Gerda-Marie Neumann, Senior Physician Assistant and Coding Specialist at the hospital. "Media disruptions are a thing of the past, fewer errors occur and questions can be answered immediately at the bedside."

"The connectivity of the coding specialists contributes significantly to the liquidity of our company," explains Managing Director, Heinz-Gerd Schröders. "In order to be able to issue an invoice for hospital treatment promptly, we are dependent on the complete documentation of the treatment case." The quality of the data is therefore decisive in the quality of the coding and billing. "Compared to the past, we no longer run the risk of incomplete or delayed billing for services provided."

The Heinsberg Municipal Hospital has by no means completed the digitalization of its processes. At the end of 2019, a portal is to be introduced there through which patients can make appointments from home. "We always keep our HIS up to date with the latest developments and are always open to useful enhancements," explains Jörg Neidig. In terms of digitalization, we are right at the forefront.



The hospital information system iMedOne at the Heinsberg Clinic is used in the Center of digitization.

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