

Engineer **Stefan Wollschläger**, a partner in Visality Consulting GmbH, Berlin, and **Dr Gregor Zehle MBA**, a senior consultant at GÖK Consulting AG, Berlin, discuss the benefits of a strategy transfer from the aviation sector to operating theatre management

Aviation, a sector that for decades has been characterised by continual growth, but also extreme competition and pressure to reduce costs, exhibits structural parallels with hospitals. Airlines, airports and aviation service providers have developed strategies for survival in this politically influenced and fought over environment. Strategies that are successfully employed in aviation can be modified and transferred to hospital management. The example used here is the operating theatre, one of the central proponents for costs and profits, as well as often a hospital bottle neck.

Infrastructural bottlenecks

Aviation capacities are structurally narrowly limited. Runways for take off and landing, air space and parking spaces are scant resources that must be used optimally. European airspace is centrally coordinated from Brussels, from where slots are allocated, time windows for take off that must be adhered to. Each airport is simultaneously targeting optimum use of its capacities. Not all aero-

plane neck capacities. If an airline wishes to prioritise flights within its fleet, then the value of the flights will be compared. The criteria for this decision-making process are the number and status of the passengers, the relevance of transit passengers for connecting flights and the importance of those flights for competition.

What does all this mean for the management of operating theatres? Available surfaces and pathways are infrastructural bottle necks in the operating theatre area. Comprehensive advance planning relating to capacities is also required in this case. Deviation from the rule is the norm: complications, cancelled operations, emergencies. Therefore, there must be an operating theatre management in place that co-ordinates special cases in accordance with agreed rules and ensures that the interests of different specialist units are equally served. To this end, medical or economic determination of priorities can be consulted. Assessment of these measures from an ethical standpoint is the hospital management's job. Prerequisite

Airlines have detailed knowledge on the procedures, costs and duration of the ground processes and have alternative strategies to deal with any deviations from this pattern. In all cases, reaction is immediate. Ground traffic service providers work towards minimising unproductive empty slots and maximising the use of employees and equipment. Flexible employee deployment models and the evaluation of the service performance are essential factors. Furthermore, airlines operate comprehensive, cost-oriented fleet and crew management. For example, should an aeroplane be grounded, then alternative actions are prioritised in accordance with measures of value and dispositive decisions are rapidly taken.

Similar questions are posed for operating theatre management. Equipment and personnel are high value production factors that constitute the added value of the operating theatre. Empty slots endanger cost effectiveness. The primary and secondary processes must therefore be synchronised and standardised in reference models, under consideration of



Dr Mengibar: For me, it is a privilege and a pleasure to be the director of a hospital that is a member of the USP Hospitales group, which is indisputably Spain's leading hospital group and, through it, we have begun making forays into the international sphere, in Portugal and Morocco.

Inasmuch as we benefit from the support of a major hospital group, USP Hospital de Marbella offers superb services in terms of quality, and compliance with standards, plus we're in the vanguard when it comes to medical equipment and hospital information system technology. Our patient records are fully integrated and digitised. We also offer advanced training courses for our staff on an ongoing basis and regularly exchange information with various other hospitals.

USP Hospitales was founded by Gabriel Masfurroll, who is also the organisation's chairman and CEO. The company has a board of directors comprising a general corporate director, a director for Spain, a chief legal counsel, an international affairs director, a corporate marketing and communication director, and a corporate development director. USP also has an executive board comprising a corporate information systems director, corporate infrastructure and a technology director, a corporate human resources director, corporate finance director, and corporate strategic planning director. The board of directors for Spain comprises a medical director, nursing director, hospital director and a director for new products. These various boards provide each hospital with the requisite support, thus allowing for rapid integration into the hospital group and generating synergy that is beneficial for all concerned.

We are part of a corporate group, but it has a youthful and enterprising spirit, and every day it teaches us how to keep growing, and how to ensure that we're delivering clinical excellence and optimal healthcare. Being part of this organisation has also enabled me to become a manager, thanks to the generosity of Gabriel Masfurroll. The company's shareholder structure is as follows: 65% is owned by Cinven, a leading British equity fund, 25% by the founding manager team, and 10% by Caixa Geral de Depositos.

What distinguishes USP Hospital de Marbella from other centres?

It's been four years since USP Hospitales acquired USP Hospital de Marbella, and during that time we've remained true to our objectives, which are to offer a full range of quality healthcare services, personalised and caring treatment, and hotel services that allow for maximum comfort.

We excel in terms of the completeness of the healthcare services we offer, which are always provided in a personalised manner. We handle all cases, regardless of their complexity, in a manner that respects and takes account of a patient's individual needs and problems. In addition to personalised service we also offer healthcare on a multilingual basis. We have an Attentiveness to the Patient department, which visits all patients on a daily basis and which, for foreign patients, handles matters pertaining to repatriation and hotel stay extensions both for the patient and his or her family.

What main services does your hospital provide?

We have diagnostic equipment that integrates the latest medical technologies, thus allowing for virtual

Take off in the operating theatre

planes can land and take off in accordance with the airlines' wishes; landing sequences, holding patterns and slots must be observed. Parking spaces close to buildings are also rare and comprehensive planning for their allocation is required.

The tool for optimum use of these bottlenecks is flexible planning and coordination, as well as a value-oriented prioritisation of the flight events. Planned runway capacities and parking spaces are continually adapted to the current requirements: changes due to delays, cancellations and weather conditions are the norm in the aviation business. Flight security and the airport management adopt a sovereign role, such that the airlines' interests need to be considered comprehensively in the planning for bot-

tom this is the presence of a comprehensive medical strategy within the hospital and a moderated synchronisation process between all participants.

High value production factors

Another characteristic of the airline business is the use of high value production factors, in particular the personnel and the aircraft. High costs result in the optimisation target of operating at full capacity whenever possible, in order to reduce individual costs to the minimum – always ensuring that all security requirements are fulfilled.

An aeroplane only earns money when it is in the air. Time on the ground must be kept to a minimum and the passenger, luggage and freight flows must be geared towards ensuring this is the case.

deviations from standard procedure. Flexibility is required in the deployment of personnel and this must be reflected in working times and deployment models, as well as in task profiles. The aim must be to have the capacity to react in the short-term and in a cost effective manner to delays, curtailments and cancellations to operations. Furthermore, a comprehensive disposition for deployment is required, thus optimally using the high value personnel resources. In doing this, employment law and ergonomic restrictions as well as quality assurance must be adhered to.

High competitive pressure

Competition is a defining element in aviation and exists between airlines and, in the interim, now also between airports.

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