

# We need different thinking about communication in healthcare

Pfalzlinikum CEO Paul Bomke suggests that a new paradigm is needed in our thinking about communication in healthcare, especially around mental health...

It is increasingly clear that greater dialogue between stakeholders and innovative new approaches go far in addressing the challenges facing healthcare systems today. In an interview, Pfalzlinikum's CEO, Paul Bomke, underlines the importance of communication in healthcare settings.



## What are the primary challenges today in healthcare, and how can a focus on leadership help to overcome them?

The primary challenge at the moment is confronting the so-called 'VUCA-World': volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. These four issues are increasing in our work at the moment, in Germany and across Europe, in health issues, particularly when it comes to mental health. As a leader I am dealing with new forms of complexity while working to increase contact with more stakeholders. For leaders generally, we need to encourage the spread of skills beyond those that make a good administrator or manager; you need an understanding of what is



important across the sector. For example, you have to find ways to implement new instruments for scanning the (social) environment.

## How can healthcare leaders better engage with policy makers, and why is this so important?

As the complexity is increasing, policy makers need to be aware that they are part of this. When it comes to health legislation, we occasionally encourage them to reduce the complexity through their own interventions. Recently, two big laws were passed in our field. The first is about social welfare and the second is about financing mental health. In this process, my role was to speak to policy makers about the issue of interdependence of the two sectors (welfare and health), which are involved when they discuss new laws and what is important for day to day work.

We take this approach of working to understand how others are organised in order to confront challenges. Taking into account the European view can help policy makers understand that there are other solutions for the challenges we face across Europe. I always try to bring this into the discussion when meeting with policy makers in Germany; for instance, looking at how the UK is dealing with the prevention or how mental health is being treated in Scandinavia or in Italy. New ideas must always be brought into the discussion to help policy makers widen their understanding.

## Do you feel the European institutions can play a greater role in this arena?

The EU work on health is focused on bringing together all the different healthcare systems. Improvements could be made on how experts come



together at the European level to enhance their understanding of innovation and different practices. In many ways Europe should act to improve dialogue between countries rather than taking up new powers and its own legislation issues.

**“We have to invest and embrace a broader view of communication issues, rather than how I can convince a partner, or market, of a solution to a problem, the emphasis should be on social change for all and the role that communication plays.”**

### **How do you think the dialogue between the healthcare system, policy makers and the public can be enhanced?**

This is a key area in which we are working on at the moment, it is what we call social communication. We have to invest and embrace a broader view

of communication issues, rather than in convincing a partner, or market, of a solution to a problem. The emphasis should be on social change for all and the role that communication plays. For example, when it comes to interest in our work on mental health, we have seen that experts like to have a disease marketing and communication strategy. However, there is no view on health literacy in the mental health context. The reason for this is that we are trained to focus on things that are not working, always trying to convince people that if they do not do something they will get ill.

Our frameworks approach is more about improving health literacy or improving competence and participation in the communication process. This is more an approach of focusing on what is good for health, rather than what helps you to avoid becoming ill.

This kind of thinking requires a totally different approach to communication with partners and stakeholders. The approach is a new form of dialogue which I am working on to implement in our region, when it comes to prevention around mental health.



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