Partnership Models: Adding Value, Enabling Innovation

In an increasingly complex healthcare system, 'going it alone' is an obsolete approach. Partnership models create new opportunities at all levels and allow hospitals to keep innovating even under difficult circumstances.

Text: Philipp Grätzel von Grätz | Illustrations: Jens Amende

n modern healthcare systems, hospitals are exposed to a great deal of pressure. Financial resources are finite. Not least due to demographic change, staff are in increasingly short supply. And at this transitional stage on the path to a knowledge society, providers of inpatient treatment face the challenging task of managing steadily increasing data volumes.

Peter Gocke, MD, is the Chief Digital Officer of Charité, Berlin's oldest hospital, and one of the biggest in Europe. In May 2019, at the Hauptstadtkongress event, Germany's premier convention for the medical and healthcare sector, he noted that in such an environment, access to data and technology is of enormous importance: "Ultimately, hospitals want to practice better medicine. Digitalization and the availability of data make this possible, while providing better security for patients." However, he explained, this can only succeed when taking into account the complex organic nature of a modern hospital environment: "We need to relieve pressure on our doctors and caregivers and provide digital services not only to patients, but also to their families. We must transcend sectoral boundaries and eliminate the two-track administration of research data and care data."





Interoperable platforms facilitate cooperative models

One important component of this process, as Gocke points out, are digital platforms that can merge a hospital's data in a structured format while also allowing outside partners to interact digitally with the institution in question. This may be required, for instance, in connection with clinical studies or registries, for collecting patient-reported outcomes, or for making use of digital apps and algorithms.

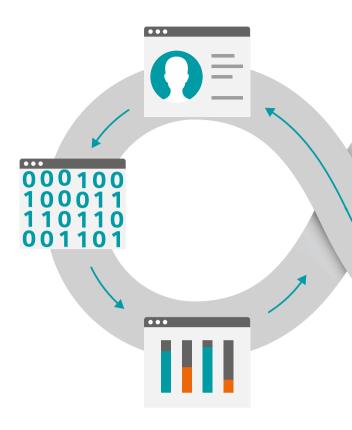
In close cooperation with industry partners, Charité is currently developing an interoperable data platform geared toward cooperation and data availability. And, as Gocke emphasizes, the effort is already bearing fruit: An alert algorithm is, for example, being implemented throughout the hospital to prevent patients with incipient kidney damage from slipping into acute kidney failure. A number of other potential applications are conceivable, he believes, once a hospital breaks down its data silos.

Eliminating investment backlogs through technology partnerships

Overarching data platforms for entire hospitals are one area where it makes sense for a hospital to enter into cooperation with industry partners and other institutions. Another area where cooperation can help overcome the challenges facing hospitals is the field of medical technology. For instance, Klinikum Braunschweig (Braunschweig Medical Center) has entered into a technology cooperation with Siemens Healthineers to help resolve the investment backlog affecting diagnostic and therapeutic medical equipment, without losing sight of economic efficiency.

"Our aim was to further sharpen the profile of our flagships, such as the oncology department, while at the same time ensuring and scheduling the modernization of large-scale equipment across the entire hospital," explains Managing Director Andreas Goepfert, MD. To this end, even before calls for tenders were issued, the center's medical technology experts sat down with service providers as well as the hospital's administration and controlling sections for some highly structured preliminary debates on the necessary requirements.

"Because they allow for longer-term contracts, technology partnerships are well suited to taking better advantage of useful innovation leaps,"

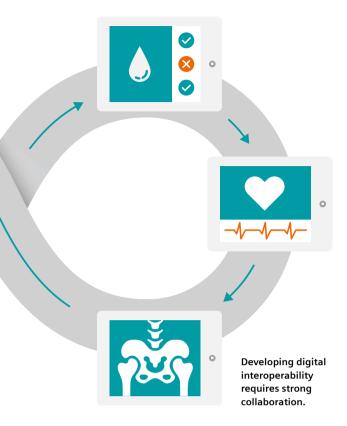


Goepfert emphasizes. At the same time, processes can be optimized and staff needs addressed, not least because the standardization of the equipment fleet eliminates discrepancies in operational philosophy and mitigates the problems associated with interfaces.

"For us as manufacturers, such partnerships are becoming increasingly relevant," as Soeren Eichhorst, MD, PhD, Global Head of Healthcare Consulting at Siemens Healthineers, explains. He points out that partnership models are extremely flexible constructs. In the interests of fostering value partnerships, they may include not only innovation planning and consulting on workflows and work processes, but also pay-per-use agreements and risk-sharing approaches.

Employee satisfaction increasingly important

The RHÖN-KLINIKUM AG company maintains a technology partnership with Siemens Healthineers based at its Bad Neustadt campus. Stephan Holzinger, CEO of RHÖN-KLINIKUM AG, argues that partnerships should be conceived even more broadly. While cost-sharing and quality improvement are important, he says: "Within



our organization, we are going further and considering options for entering into partnerships that support employee retention and staff recruitment."

By way of example, Holzinger cites the company's cooperation with an IT firm that provides easy access to corporate employee benefits, ranging from childcare to a package delivery service. At the University Hospital of Giessen, an app is being evaluated that optimizes patient calls with the aim of minimizing unnecessary foot travel, internally referred to as "sneaker time". To support the doctors' work, the hospital and an Austrian partner company are jointly developing a medical cockpit that uses scanning and semantic analysis to process documents provided by the patient in a way that allows the physician to identify key information that is relevant to the treatment path within seconds.

Building networks for research and care

Looking beyond partnerships with IT companies, medical technology providers, or startup companies, hospitals operating in a modern healthcare system are also increasingly dependent on traditional forms of networking with collaborating institutions. To be able to provide high-end medical care at a time when Germany's two-tier hospital financing system no longer suffices to cover the innovation requirements, Heidelberg University Hospital, for example, cooperates closely with other clinics in the vicinity, based on 53 cooperation agreements. There are similar agreements with 45 doctors' practices.

Cooperation models between hospitals are indispensable, especially when it comes to research – a point emphasized by Professor Heyo Kroemer, MD, Dean and Speaker of the Board of University Medical Center Göttingen: "The concept of a solitary clinic that brings together all available technologies under a single roof is a thing of the past." In the field of genome sequencing, for example, he notes that it is not possible for a single institution to build up all of the necessary capacities. Instead, a national infrastructure is required here, as also recently suggested by the working group on infrastructure at the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

Kroemer believes genome sequencing is also a good example of a scenario in which partnership models that originated in research and development ultimately also become important for medical treatment. For in times of precision medicine, genetic sequencing is swiftly becoming part of everyday diagnostics and therapy.

Kroemer, set to become the new director of Berlin's Charité, expects a similar "diffusion" into healthcare in the case of the Medical Informatics Initiative, an ongoing large-scale program funded by the BMBF. Under this umbrella, university hospitals have formed several consortia that aim to build up joint patient databases with the help of numerous industry partners, including Siemens Healthineers. This will allow research across multiple institutions and support the implementation of big data projects aimed at improving medical treatment in areas such as intensive care, antibiotic therapy, or sepsis.

Philipp Grätzel von Grätz is a freelance medical and healthcare journalist based in Berlin. He is specialized in digitalization, technology, and cardiovascular therapy.

The statements by Siemens Healthineers customers described herein are based on results that were achieved in the customer's unique setting. Since there is no "typical" hospital and many variables exist (e.g., hospital size, case mix, level of IT adoption) there can be no guarantee that other customers will achieve the same results.