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COVID-19 Superheroes

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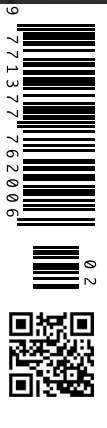
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Crossing the Rubicon to a Digitally Enabled Medical Care

Interviewee: Dr [Alessandro Roncacci](#) | Chief Medical Officer Interim | Affidea Group

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a catalyst for healthcare to embrace digital care. Affidea Group is already on this path and has outlined four priority areas to ensure the best possible care delivery for patients, doctors and providers.



Key Points

- Due to the need of minimal physical contact, the pandemic accelerated the healthcare's transition to digital care delivery.
- Safety is more important than ever, with reimagined workflows in place that can ensure efficiency, precise diagnostics and better patients' experience.
- Affidea has launched home care services and video consultations in several countries to provide patients with a fast and secure way to see their doctor from the comfort of their home.
- Teleradiology will have an increasingly important role and Affidea is already pioneering it benefitting from its platform of interconnected centers.

There are turning points in history when nothing afterwards would ever be the same again. This has been happening from ancient times when a decision determined who would lead the world forward to particular inventions that turned our world upside down. When Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon River with his army in 49 BCE, he precipitated the Roman Civil War, which ultimately led to the rise of the Imperial Era of Rome. That day was a turning point in history, and everyone knew they would either emerge victorious or vanquished.

We are living a decisive moment in the healthcare industry. Even before the pandemic, we were witnessing a new trend in healthcare delivery – the shift from hospitals towards more outpatient settings, while the digital transformation was a point in everyone's agenda as a long-term objective. COVID-19 has accelerated this trend and has become the bridge for all of us to cross 'the digital Rubicon' in medicine.

The driving principle is to minimise exposure to physical contact wherever possible along the patients and doctors' pathway: from appointment and registering to reporting and receiving the exams, everything needs to happen online as much as possible. Patients will enter the medical centre only for the examination.

How can patients, healthcare providers and doctors adapt to this new normal? By embracing a new model of digital care delivery, with a sharper focus on patients and doctors' safety and with reimagined workflows that can

ensure efficiency, precise diagnostics and better patient experience.

At Affidea, we have aligned to the new market conditions, prioritising four things: maintaining the highest safety standards in our centres to protect our staff and patients; reshaping our operating model and the workflow in the centres; developing solutions to support the national health systems; and responding to the needs of patients and private companies with new customised services.

Safety becomes more important than ever

When restrictions have been gradually lifted across all countries, as a leading European healthcare provider with strong safety standards in place, Affidea has created a 'Care for Health' programme to support businesses to return to work safely. In countries like Greece, Italy, Hungary, Portugal, we have become the preferred healthcare partner of many private companies from different industries. We are offering them consultancy in safety measures and swab and antibody testing in compliance with national healthcare regulations and labour policies.

Our lab capabilities were crucial while navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, and it showed us that it can be more and more integrated with our portfolio of diagnostic imaging services and medical consultations in order to step into the predictive medicine field as a leading healthcare provider.

With a click away, patients can bring the doctor to their home today

One massive change brought by COVID-19 is remote care. When physical distancing is so crucial to slow the spread of the virus, the remote appointment options allow patients to continue managing their health and see their doctor safely from the comfort of their own home. This made healthcare providers to think out of the medical centre 'box,' adopting telemedicine or home care services.

At Affidea we have launched both home care services (blood collection, nursing, rehabilitation or diagnostic

patients recovering from COVID-19 is needed.

Together with our Thoracic Imaging Subspecialty Experts, Affidea has developed a follow-up programme with a multidisciplinary approach for patients recovering from COVID-19. At three months from discharge, all COVID-19 patients need to undergo a physical examination benefitting from the expertise of an interdisciplinary team, functional evaluation of the lungs and conventional chest radiography, with the possibility of adding a high-resolution CT if any abnormalities are found.

To increase patients' safety, our sub-speciality experts have developed low-dose CT protocols that allow accu-

How can patients, healthcare providers and doctors adapt to the new normal? By embracing a new model of digital care delivery

services at home) and video consultations in several countries to provide patients with a fast and secure way to see their doctor from the comfort of their home. They can connect with their Affidea Doctor in a matter of minutes. From anywhere they can go online. It's fast, affordable and convenient.

As one of the early pioneers in digital transformation, we see a similar shift in remote reading. Teleradiology will have an increasingly important role, and at Affidea, we have already moved into this direction, taking advantage of our platform of interconnected centres and impressive network of radiologists across 16 countries. An interesting study published in the American Journal of Radiology (Quraishi et al. 2020) has shown that more than 56% of radiologists would prefer to continue reporting offline, even post-COVID-19. The ability to access images in real-time, safely and securely, safeguarding patients' privacy, can improve efficiency, productivity and doctors' experience. 65% of radiologists from the same study reported decreased stress levels and 96% found improved or no change in turnaround times. This is the start of the telemedicine era.

As we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, an important focus will be the clinical follow-up for patients that tested positive for COVID-19

Although the lung is the most severely affected organ in patients that contract the virus, COVID-19 may increase the risk for other diseases like cardiovascular, neurological and renal diseases. Therefore, a careful follow-up of

rate identification and characterisation of interstitial lung abnormalities. Moreover, our Dose Excellence programme will enable us to optimise the radiation dose patients receive during a CT while ensuring a high-quality image. In this way, we make sure that patients recovering from COVID-19 have the best possible care along their medical journey.

In all 16 countries where Affidea is present, we have the know-how and experience, reliable and recognised safety procedures in place, a dedicated team of professionals and state-of-the-art equipment to be the preferred partner for doctors, patients and payors, be they public or private, standing by them when times are tough. ■

REFERENCES

Quraishi MI et al. [2020] Off-Site Radiology Workflow Changes Due to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 [COVID-19] Pandemic. *Journal of the American College of Radiology*, 17(7):878-881.