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Education and Training in Affidea – Developing a New Generation of Leaders



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Affidea is known for clinical excellence and operational efficiency, but at Healthmanagement.org we are most interested in exploring what Affidea is doing with training and education.

We spoke to Dr Rowland Illing, Affidea Chief Medical Officer, about this topic both in the clinical domain and in the more challenging area of leadership.

As a commercial company, how does Affidea benefit by investing in education and training?

Affidea has a responsibility to invest in the education and training of all staff. Each Affidea country provides educational resources for its local staff but, until recently, there has been no group level platform to coordinate resources. We partnered with the European School of Radiology (ESOR) to develop the Asklepios Training Course, a basic radiology program which we offer to all clinicians.

The benefit to Affidea is clear – better trained staff leads to better care for our patients. Better leadership means enhanced governance and development of staff improves recruitment and retention. I want all staff groups - contracted and employed - to be equally supported.

The Affidea Academy has recently been established. What is its purpose?

The Affidea Academy comprises two elements – The Clinical Academy and the Leadership Academy.

The Clinical Academy was piloted last year with two educational events - the Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) Prostate Training Course in Budapest, Hungary and a Medical Physics Radiotherapy Workshop in Poznan, Poland. The former brought together radiologists from 11 countries with expertise in MRI and academic colleagues from University College London, UK. We spent two days aligning how MRI was performed and reported across the group. Each team returned to their own country to establish a centre of excellence and spread the standards to country colleagues in their own language. The Medical Physics Radiotherapy Workshop brought together staff from our radiotherapy centres for training and consensus building across the network.

On the back of these successful pilots, we recruited an experienced educator as Clinical Academy Lead, bringing

together resources from across our countries. In the same way we leverage our scale to improve operational efficiency and procurement across the group, we take the best educational practices from our countries and spread the learning to benefit all. We are also developing a subspecialty network to improve the strength and depth of expertise.

“ LEADERSHIP AND BUSINESS SKILLS ARE OFTEN OVERLOOKED IN THE TRAINING OF CLINICAL DISCIPLINES - DOCTORS, TECHNICIANS AND NURSING STAFF ALIKE ”

How does the Leadership Academy fit in?

We receive great support from our human resources teams. They understand we need great managers but also clinicians who can manage and lead teams. We are fortunate to have excellent Country Medical Directors but we must train the next generation of doctors to step up into positions of responsibility. Leadership and business skills are often overlooked in the training of clinical disciplines – doctors, technicians and nursing staff alike. We want to nurture those with an interest in health systems and challenge them to be future leaders.

In the UK, the Faculty for Medical Leadership and Management focuses on this ethos. But this is not the norm across Europe. There is often little incentive for clinicians to lead outside their immediate clinical environment, except as part of an academic institution.

By the way, this isn't true in the U.S. Physicians have to be more entrepreneurial and their presence in leadership roles are not only accepted but expected. A professor can step out of academia to be involved in a start-up and return to lecturing. This is an anathema to the European ethos.



Prostate MRI Clinical Academy

To move forward, we have partnered with the London School of Economics (LSE), UK to create a Leadership Academy. We will start by supporting current leadership and health management and extend learning to talented individuals in our network.

What other benefits do you see from creating a central Affidea Academy?

The Academy allows us to develop subspecialty radiology groups with representatives from each of our countries. Our in-house experts comprise professors and clinical researchers from across radiology and cancer care specialties. As one of the largest procurers of medical imaging and cancer care equipment globally, we are also fortunate to have privileged relationships with equipment manufacturers. They have enormous resources to support our staff and they want their equipment to be used to its fullest potential – a synergistic relationship bringing mutual benefit.

How do you see the role of human resources in this process?

We have excellent HR support at Group and Country level. The team understand that non-targeted training, other than core mandatory subjects, is of limited value. However, tailored training opportunities require huge investment in time and resources. The Affidea Academy is developing a new centralised HR information system to track and support staff and provide meaningful personal development.

What are the next steps for the Affidea Clinical Academy?

We are unifying the way we perform radiology and radiotherapy. Our Dose Excellence, MR Excellence and Radiotherapy Programs ensure common protocols between centres and countries. For me, the next step is unifying

the way images and treatments are reported. Consensus is key and this is more easily achieved in an independent company than in a state or academic system. Likewise, agreement on key performance indicators and the way these are reported will be the future focus of the Academy.

Are there any other benefits the Academy may bring?

To engage with machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI), it is essential to unify the way we acquire imaging, perform radiation therapy and structure reports. The press regularly write about this area but the boring truth is that it is difficult for computer scientists to draw meaningful conclusions without standardising inputs. We are talking with several leading AI developers interested in working with uniform data.

Establishing a pan-European training academy will also allow us to support our colleagues in the state sector. In several countries we are discussing how we support non-Affidea staff in training and education. This may be an interesting future direction.

What would be your take home message?

Education and training is at the heart of our business. We have a fantastic opportunity to disrupt the way it is delivered and potential benefits are huge. ■



DISCLOSURE:

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