



Model for the future

Refurbished CV systems

Who/where

Ambulanten Herzzentrum Berlin,
Germany

Dr. Bernd Wille,
Senior Cardiologist

Challenge

Equipping a privately run and owned cardiology center on a tight budget, without compromising the quality of care delivered

Solution

Philips Integris angiography systems, refurbished and upgraded with digital flat panel technology by the Diamond Select program

Politicians tell us to take more initiative in looking after ourselves. For Dr. Bernd Wille of the Outpatient Heart Center (Ambulanten Herzzentrum, or AHZ) in Berlin, this has meant exploring the business possibilities for private practices. With a keen eye on return on investment, he has focused on essentials to ensure uncompromised healthcare delivery on a tight budget. A central example is his refurbished cardiac angiography system.

For Dr. Wille, the path to his own practice is rooted in his conviction as an invasive cardiologist. After a career in nuclear medicine and angiology in university clinics in both Hanover and Kiel, and later on in electrophysiology and pacemakers, he decided to open an independent practice – the Outpatient Heart Center, Berlin. His practice is situated in a developing area in the east of Berlin, where many other private practitioners are forming a mutually supportive medical community by complementing each other's specialties.

The center, which moved to a new location in April 2005, focuses three days a week on outpatients – diagnostic work and follow-ups for pacemaker and ICD patients. The remaining two days Dr. Wille works in the cath lab, on a refurbished Integris Allura with flat detector. He manages 500 catheter examinations a year, with 150 to 180 of these PTCAs, around 120 to 130 pacemakers, and 30 to 35 ICD implantations. The cardiac cath lab is certified by the health authority for use for operations, such as implanting pacemakers or ICD's.

Productive environment

Though medical care is always in the foreground, the success of the Outpatient Heart Center depends on the economics in the background. This is first and foremost founded on efficient operation, which enables the center to provide clinical-quality diagnoses and therapies at a reasonable price.

To simplify the business organization and administration, the center is set up as a limited company, managed by Dr. Wille's wife. She also has a medical background and can therefore understand both the economic and clinical issues involved – an important prerequisite for efficient management.

PHILIPS



Dr. Bernd Wille

The carefully planned layout of the building simplifies patient traffic, maximizes patient throughput and minimizes the distances between the different areas. Dr. Wille: "We don't have to waste time between patients this way, and the turnover of patients is as frictionless as possible." Thanks to this efficient way of working, the center can see up to 80 outpatients or perform up to 9 interventions a day, with only 4 full-time staff.

"Compared with the new digital angiography system I have used, I can see no decisive differences".

Setting priorities

The Outpatient Heart Center tries to minimize its patient stays where possible. Dr. Wille: "Numerous studies prove that this is an important factor in reducing the complication rate, and is not primarily an economic decision, though it has a big effect on reducing costs."

Usually catheter and pacemaker patients are discharged on the day of the intervention. Dr. Wille and his staff observe ICD patients overnight before discharging them the following day. By staying in the center at night they are also available for discharged patients who need help. Dr. Wille: "I think this is important for the patient's sense of security: they know somebody is available in the center, and not just on call."

Concentrating on what is important extends to the care taken with investments too. They took as much equipment as practicable from a previous practice, such as the Philips M3 monitors in the recovery rooms. However, they invested in new equipment where it matters most. Like an electronic patient record, which automatically compiles a patient report during the examination and makes this information on demand available everywhere in the center and from home. And because much of the center's work depends on an angiography system, it was important to invest in a new angiography system for the cath lab.

Convincing offer

Despite long experience working with Philips angiography, the price of a new Philips digital angiography system pushed Dr. Wille's early decision towards a competitor. This was when the Philips representative introduced the idea of a refurbished, Diamond Select system – one that had started out as analog, but had been upgraded with a digital flat-panel detector as part of its overhaul.

"The Diamond Select system Philips offered me was essentially the same as the digital angiography system in the nearby Accident Hospital Berlin, with which I work closely together," he explains. "To have consistent systems would make this cooperation much easier. Combined with the attractive price of the Diamond Select system and excellent Philips service and financing options, this convinced me to once again choose for Philips."

Carefully selected

The care Philips takes in refurbishing starts with selecting pre-owned systems that were well cared for and have a solid service history – the diamonds among the used equipment. These are then brought back to the Diamond Select factory where they are disassembled, checked, cleaned, and disinfected. All casings are repainted to ensure the optical result meets the aesthetic expectations for a high-quality solution. But most importantly, all vacuum components are renewed and the imaging electronics are updated and upgraded to the most recent revision possible.

Compared to buying a second-hand car, Diamond Select is equivalent to a fundamental overhaul of the bodywork, and then installing a new engine and gearbox. Naturally, after taking all this care, Diamond Select systems qualify for the same warranty and support as a new system. "Compared with the new digital cardiac angiography system I have used," says Dr. Wille, "I can see no decisive differences".

Versatile system

The ceiling-mounted Integris Allura with flat detector is a state-of-the-art system suitable for both cardiac and EP procedures. It brings excellent digital imaging performance to the cath lab, offering the perfect environment for all cardiac and EP applications – from standard diagnostic studies to the most demanding interventional procedures. The flat detector offers high resolution, compactness and

better patient accessibility than conventional angiography systems. A full range of imaging options gives the flexibility to configure the system to match clinical needs and way of working. Thus, the system can be optimized for diagnostic, interventional or EP applications, or a combination depending on the case mix.



The refurbished Integris Allura with flat detector

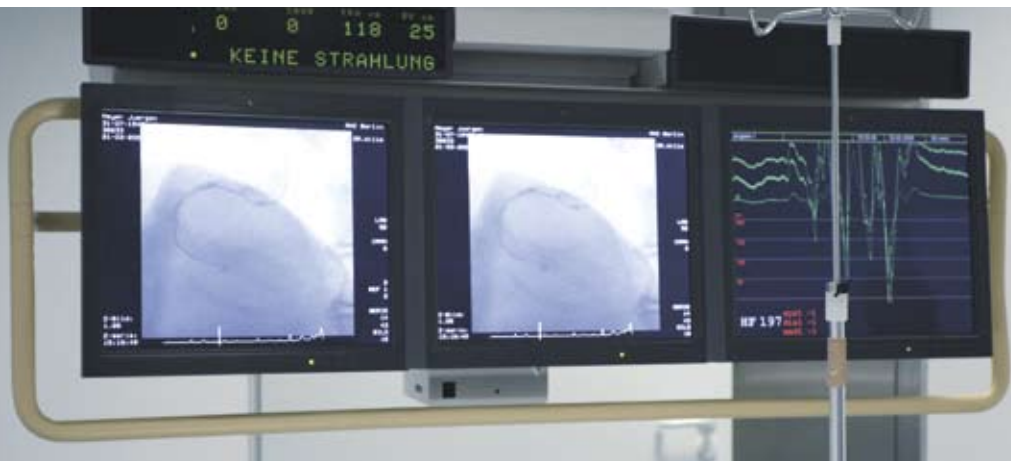
Convincing performance

According to Dr. Wille, the system's digital technology has helped to significantly reduce the X-ray dosage – by up to two-thirds compared with the traditional angiography system he had used before. This was a particularly welcome improvement for therapeutic interventions that extend over many image sequences. "Although initially I had some doubts about the image quality, the images provide much detail in the fine grey shading, which can make it possible for example to diagnose eccentric stenoses, even when the G-arm is not fully aligned with the plane of the narrowing." The system is also easy to work with, "I am especially pleased with the system's ceiling mount, which enables fast and flexible positioning of the G-arm wherever it is needed, and the flat-screen displays, which are bright enough to use even when the room is fully lit."

Ahead of his time

Dr. Wille formed his model for healthcare delivery as an independent provider before it gained its current political popularity, and his approach has already been recognized by several German health insurers. This puts him ahead of the game, gaining experience that could benefit many other specialties.

A key part of his future plans are alliances with local, like-minded colleagues from complementary disciplines, such as the neighboring MR unit for cardiology applications. With a radiation therapy center due to open in the vicinity soon, Dr. Wille also sees to complement their services by expanding into brachytherapy in the Outpatient Heart Center, Berlin. Even winning models need forward thinking to ensure continued success.



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