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# The refugee guide as an innovative project: Development, implementation and use at the University Hospital Carl Gustav Carus Dresden

## Abstract

In recent times, hospitals in Germany face new challenges related to the rising number of refugees and their medical treatment. The biggest challenges pose vague administrative processes and the language barriers. To tackle these challenges, the University Hospital Carl Gustav Carus Dresden (UKD) initiated an innovative project named »Refugee Guide« (»Flüchtlingslotse«). The »Refugee Guide« project offers refugees easy access to university healthcare and thus promotes their integration. This project is unique among the German hospitals and optimizes the healthcare of refugees in Dresden. The aim of this report is to describe the development, experiences of implementation and use of the project at the University Hospital Carl Gustav Carus Dresden. The data was collected through two surveys among employees at the University Hospital. The results of the surveys show that the work of the refugee guide received a high appreciation among the employees of the University Hospital. Moreover, the project optimizes the healthcare provision for refugees in Dresden. Implementation of the project was successful and led to full operation of the »Refugee Guide«. However, this could not be achieved without the mutual support of internal and external partners in Dresden.

## 1. Background

In 2015, the number of refugees in Germany rose rapidly. In particular, this was noticeable in Saxony's capital Dresden. A big challenge in this situation was, and still is, the provision of healthcare for refugees. On the one side, refugees at the moment of arrival in Germany did not automatically have an entitlement to health insurance. In order to receive medical care, they first needed to apply to the responsible social welfare office. This significantly prolonged the administrative

process. On the other side, contact with and the responsibilities of cost bearing authorities were partially unclarified. Also, the language barrier hindered these processes enormously. Furthermore, doctors and nurses needed to take over administrative tasks and were less available for their main occupation. These all factors impeded refugees' access to university medicine.

Against this background, the charity run »Run & Roll – Dresden moves!« was organized in autumn 2015 under the patronage of Petra Köpping, the Saxon State Minister for Equality and Integration and Dirk Hilbert, the Mayor of Dresden. The amount of € 75,000 raised through this charity was used to implement a central case manager to support the healthcare of refugees at the University Hospital Dresden. At this time, such project was an innovation.

## 2. Preparation of the project

The idea for the »Refugee Guide« arose primarily from the pure observations of clinical practice at the University Hospital Dresden and had to be objectively evaluated over the course of the project. In order to provide a goal-oriented and efficient implementation in the clinical setting, several questions were formulated at the beginning: What are the problems and support needs of the employees providing healthcare for refugees at the University Hospital Dresden? Which clinical structures have the greatest need for support? How effective is the work of the refugee guide at the University Hospital Dresden? The main goal of the evaluation was to involve all employees working directly with refugees into this project and to establish a tailor-made guide position for long-term success.

The project officially started on 26.10.2015 and was divided into three phases. The first phase included several steps. In the first step, an employee survey was conducted on the need for support in caring of refugees in all out- and in-patient wards and emergency departments of the University Hospital Dresden. The aim of this survey was not only to identify the need for support, but also the problems associated with refugee care and thus to confirm the need for a coordination center.

A total of 71 people participated in the October 2015 survey to identify support needs, including 17 physicians, 44 nurses and 10 medical assistants. The majority of respondents reported an in-

creased number of refugees. It became clear that there were a greater number of refugees in the out-patient wards and emergency rooms, than in the in-patient wards. On the other side, it has been confirmed that document management, the organization of interpreters, the clarification of cost bearers and the application for cost cover in particular are regarded as difficult and time-consuming. The additional time required to carry out these organizational needs was estimated to be seven to ten minutes more for the care of a refugee patient, than for a local patient. Due to this comprehensive problem situation, a number support needs were indicated by the participants of the survey. Particular tasks, for which support was required, and their percentual distribution are presented in the Figure 1.

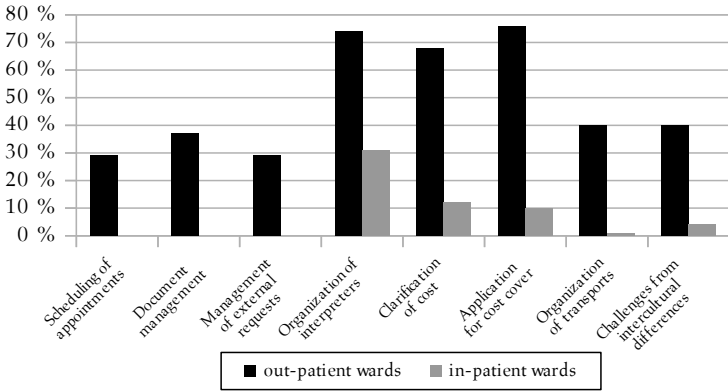


Figure 1: Activities requiring support

Since all of these activities proved to be very time-consuming for the employees and the wish for more support was expressed, it was considered to create the position of a refugee guide, who would support the clinic staff by taking over organizational tasks in the daily medical care.

Subsequently, these survey results were used for the job description of the refugee guide. A qualified employee of the staff from the hospital, Robert Bitterlich, was appointed for this position. Due to the new requirements of this position and in preparation for the implementation, Mr. Bitterlich created an extensive network both in and outside the hospital, i.e. Saxony Regional Directorate, Social Welfare Office, Community Interpreter Service, Refugee Reception Center

and the German Red Cross, to establish cooperation with these institutions and to improve the transition management.

### 3. Implementation of the project

After thorough preparation, the project could move on to the initial implementation phase on 4. 1. 2016. In the implementation phase, the refugee guide Robert Bitterlich was able to start his work as a central case manager in full time at the University Hospital Dresden. To prove the effectiveness and target achievement of the implemented project structure, an accompanying evaluation was carried out over a period of two months. After successful evaluation, the project status was upgraded and implemented as a regular service.

According to the needs, the following main tasks were defined for the guide:

1. Clarification of cost bearing authorities, filing of applications for cost cover in emergency cases and planned in-patient and out-patient hospital treatments
2. Organization of interpreters
3. Assessment about the necessity to be treated in the University Hospital, in cooperation with the medical staff
4. Organization of treatment and admission appointments and monitoring of the treatment process
5. Clarification of social needs of refugees in cooperation with the clinic's social service and external social workers for refugees
6. Counselling of external and internal partners
7. Creation of a network for the medical care of refugees

Additionally, secondary tasks were defined, which encompassed collection and maintenance of evaluation data as well as the medical and administrative documentation of cases according to the guidelines of the University Hospital Dresden. The aim was to reduce the barriers for access to healthcare for refugees, to enable resource-saving care by bundling all inquiries to a coordinating office and at the same time to increase the quality of care through efficient communication.

After four months of testing, a project evaluation was carried out. In the period from 24. 5. 2016 to 3. 6. 2016 a total of 81 persons (response rate 16.07 %) from all units of the University Hospital Dresden participated in a conducted survey. These included 7 physicians,

37 representatives of nursing staff, 20 medical assistants, 9 patient admission staff members, 5 social service staff members and 3 clerks from the Finance Division. The assessment showed extremely positive approval rates.

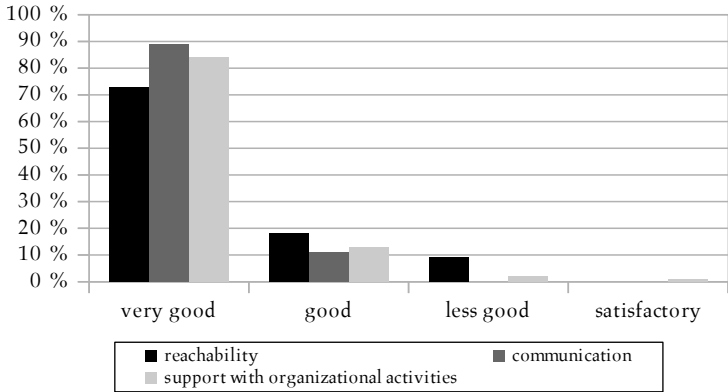


Figure 2: Performance evaluation of the refugee guide

These numbers show that the evaluation of the project was clearly positive. All surveyed professions see the greatest benefit for the refugees, but also for themselves, through the provided facilitation of work. Overall, it is clear that the refugee guide project is accepted and used by the majority of respondents. The effectiveness of the refugee guide at Dresden University Hospital, i.e. the success of the project so far, is confirmed by the good to very good results. The bundling of competences in one hand leads to a considerable relief for healthcare professionals.

The project was meant to be sponsored initially by donations. After the evaluation of April 2016, the Director of Nursing, Dipl.-PGW Jana Luntz decided to terminate the project status early and to finance the refugee guide fully out of the clinic’s budget. The remaining donation funds were dedicated completely to pay for the fees of interpreters. Interpreter’s fees are in general not paid for by any other cost-bearing authority. Currently and in the future, the refugee guide will play a key role in the medical care of refugees within the hospital. The direct care is provided by doctors, nursing staff and/or therapists. The refugee guide department is responsible for the organization of the feasibility of the treatment, e.g. by organizing interpreters or

applying for medical services in consultation with the medical service. The position is also the link between departments of the clinic, general practitioners outside the hospital, refugee social workers and other stakeholders in Dresden. This coordinating role essentially corresponds to the Case Management concept as defined by the German Society for Care and Case Management (DGCC). This procedure is already used in the German hospital landscape as well as in the German healthcare system in many areas, but not yet nationwide.

Overall, the project was a success and is in full operation. The refugee guide and colleagues are further determined to support internal and external partners and people seeking our help. No end in sight!

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