

EDITORIAL

by Roberto Crea*

The San Camillo-Forlanini has for a long time been one of the largest hospitals in Europe. You can hardly imagine how many people have worked in it and how many have been hospitalized or have crossed its gates to visit patients or to be visited.

It is, from a social perspective, an important health care institution where billions of human interactions take place, representing a huge opportunity for the whole community growth: “*The Operating Unit of International Healthcare and Cooperation with Developing Countries*” is the symbol, in this context, of the mission of this relational and cultural hub. You might ask Why?

An interesting paper published in 2010¹ clearly shows how the external projection of the activity of this hospital has been consistent with its mission in the city of Rome. In fact, it is committed to providing care to the people that need it but with a spirit and a vision that are wider than the simple and expected provision of health care services. It has in fact been put in place an educational, cultural and humanitarian programme called the “*hospital cooperation for peace building*” in the Horn of Africa. This is aligned with the Millennium Development Goals² against poverty. It is also in support of a sustainable development, as sanctioned by the United Nations and by the civil society being its horizon is the whole world and mankind.

This wide scope is kept alive by the General Manager currently in charge.

In this important high specialty hospital hub, such attitude and sensitivity have been turned into a complex system of collaboration and interaction with many associations of voluntarism and civic participation.

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1. See *Annali degli ospedali* (2010), “San Camillo e Forlanini”, Vol. 12, N. 1.

2. This document is available on the website <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> (last accessed: 18 January 2014).

Even if you might take it for granted, the hundreds of people offering in this hospital their support, providing comfort, addressing requests of information and listening to people and talking to patients and their relatives constitute a universal joint of paramount importance, connecting the image of the hospital as a place of suffering and cure on one side, and on the other the everyday life outside. The ability in relationship building and the civic competencies that many people can deploy is “the stuff this joint is made on”.

It is therefore important to underline that many of the volunteers that offer their precious time to build a better society, often have a high level of competence and a huge spirit for solidarity and empathy. We invite you to avoid seeing these extraordinary people as retired bored men and women that, just to not sadly spending their own time sitting lonely in a public garden would go to the San Camillo-Forlanini hospital to volunteer in order to spend their time in company.

We would be glad to see citizens meeting these volunteers and finding that these people spend hours to study and to do researches in order to be able to grant moments of serenity, sometimes to actually give dignity back to sick people, and also useful pieces of information to those who need it. You could see these volunteers smiling when they pass by just outside the hospital where they serve thinking that some colleagues of theirs are inside allowing many other people to feel better and less lonely. In such a way volunteers nurture their awareness of being citizens with rights and obligations, able to build of a virtuous network.

The many associations active at the San Camillo-Forlanini hospital differ in their specific objectives, their cultures and also in the organizational complexity and in the areas of their own daily activity.

Specifically, Cittadinanzattiva Lazio Onlus (which is part of the association called Cittadinanzattiva Onlus) is a movement for the civic participation of citizens established in 1978 and present in whole Italy and Europe to promote and protect the citizens’ and the consumers’ rights.

The overall mission of Cittadinanzattiva has its own foundation and roots in the article 118 of the Italian Constitution, which states: “*the State, regions, metropolitan cities, provinces and municipalities shall promote the autonomous initiatives of citizens, both as individuals and as members of associations, relating to activities of general interest on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity*”³.

Cittadinanzattiva is well established with thousands of members across the country, and has very clear objectives:

- protect citizens by preventing useless suffering and injustice;

3. See Arena G., Cotturri G., eds. (2010), *Il Valore Aggiunto – Come la sussidiarietà può salvare l’Italia*, Roma: Carocci.

- activate citizens' conscience and modify inappropriate behaviors;
- put in practice those rights that are guaranteed by the law and facilitate the acknowledgment of new rights;
- provide the citizens with instruments that can help them protect themselves and improve the level of awareness and competence in their dialogue with the institutions;
- build alliances and collaborations that are fundamental to help work out conflicts and promote rights.

Cittadinanzattiva is structured with several “networks” on specific areas of interest, one of which is the “Tribunale per i Diritti del Malato (TDM)”

This networked structure with its multiple objectives (included the TDM), is based on a systematic and global vision that can turn a conversation with a volunteer into a relation with a skilled citizen who offers an empathic “active listening”, helps processing information, transfers competences, and accompanies people along a route that eventually empowers them as active individuals that take their own responsibilities.

The theoretical roots of active citizenship practice are different from those belonging to other forms of voluntarism we know. Cittadinanzattiva strongly considers patients as citizens first of all that, like other people in a particular situation of weakness (their disease) might frequently risk the denial of elementary rights. In this context, whatever the network of Cittadinanzattiva the volunteer belongs to when intervening – either the TDM or one of the others branches – s/he acts as a “health” citizen beside a “sick” citizen, with the main aim of claiming, protecting and expanding the rights - even if basic and material - of those citizens experiencing a weakness condition.

The TDM office serves inside the San Camillo-Forlanini since 1981: with its volunteers it has guaranteed listening and support to thousands of people. We have been helping persons that were asking for information, other ones that were confused after receiving unexpected diagnoses or prognoses, others that were thinking they had not received the level of care they thought they would deserve or that they were victims of clinical malpractice. All of them have been welcomed, listened to and addressed.

We want to be clear that, however, this is not a starting point: in fact, when we meet people coming to us to ask for help, our office is the key hub of a consolidated process that can nowadays take place only thanks to the management of the San Camillo-Forlanini hospital that made it possible. We therefore can say that there exists a “before” and an “after” in the process.

I was specifically referring to this while taking about the system of relations and interconnections – complex and articulated – that projects the San

Camillo-Forlanini beyond the simple dimension of healthcare services provider.

Over time, it has been built a positive environment for the growth of a culture supporting the relationship between people and between people and the San Camillo-Forlanini hospital: this can facilitate the communication process and it represents the foundation for reciprocal understanding and respect. This concept is after all claimed by the Art 3 of our Constitution: *“All citizens have equal social status and are equal before the law, without regard to their gender, race, language, religion, political opinions, and personal or social conditions”*.

Of course it's still a long way to it as opposition and prejudice are always present when we talk about individuals, but the “system” in itself and the route taken and kept by the management of the hospital made possible what we can appreciate today.

Cittadinanzattiva – alongside the many associations that, in collaboration with those that work in the hospital, take care of people needing assistance and support – thanks to its own specific culture and vision aimed at developing and fostering citizens' empowerment, and to the alignment and consistency with the vision and culture of the hospital, succeeds in organizing several key projects; which have been proposed to all the involved parties (patients and their relatives and employees), building up in this way a network of alliances and relationships. This has not only improved the relation with the healthcare institution but also enhanced the level of benefits that citizens can receive from the actions that the associations carry out to protect their rights.

Some examples now about turning this concept into good practice.

The *“Bill of the quality in surgery”*: its principles represent those points that should be implemented in a surgical department in order to create a system able not only to cure patients but mainly to take care of them. This would allow citizens to be considered and to actually be active subjects, with high level of awareness and able to interact with the hospital and caregivers.

The *“Bill of the quality in transplantation”*: it is aimed at attaining a full, conscious, interactive and organized participation in the complex pathway from the donation to the transplant of an organ. This bill represents therefore a fundamental functional cornerstone of this complex system and wants to foster the cultural growth of our society by supporting the reciprocal exchange between institutions, professionals and people, and underpin a great act of generosity that symbolizes the transmission of life between persons.

The *“participation table”* is the fundamental instrument promoted by Cittadinanzattiva involving all the parties operating with different roles in-

side the hospital and the managers of the structure and citizens representatives: the aim of it is to find a common language and collectively take the responsibility of the meaning and of the actions of this cultural and social programme.

The “*Bill of the rights of sick people*”⁴, developed by Cittadinanzattiva and adopted by many hospitals, included the San Camillo-Forlanini, declares 14 rights for the patients that, all together, aims at ensuring a “high level of human health protection” (art 35 of the “Charter of the fundamental rights of the European Union”) and represents the actualization of fundamental rights of patients and, as such, must be recognized and respected in every country. They are also related to the duties and responsibilities that both citizens and other stakeholders of the health care system have to undertake. The Bill is to be applied to all the individuals, acknowledging in this way that differences among people (such as age, gender, religion, socio-economic conditions, etc) may influence the individual need of health care assistance.

Furthermore, we can mention the establishment of and the participation in “*groups for the meal service and the quality of the nutrition*”; the *combined monitoring and audits of the quality of health care services and management*, in order to verify the correspondence of the offered services compared the standard expectations; the “*participated process for the improvement of the access to the pathway towards the birth for immigrated women*”, instrument of paramount importance of knowledge, greeting and orientation. And much more...

Eventually, to confirm the scope of the cultural vision deployed by all the players and its relevance in order to increase the value of the relationships with the communities that move around the big hospital and that are interconnected with it at different levels, a debate is ongoing on different projects of urban regeneration of the large area where we currently have the scattered hospital buildings that will be no longer part of the hospital in the near future. It is expected that the changes in that area will be representing a moment of sharing with the whole community facilitating its cultural and civic growth: this would represent an ideal continuity with the virtuous processes put in place so far.

4. See http://www.scamilloforlanini.rm.it/html/file_allegati/guida_02012014.pdf, page 20 (last accessed: 17 January 2014).