Spyridon Gkikas – General Manager Greece & Cyprus, GE HealthCare



EU Recovery and Resilience Funding (RRF) is coming online, creating an opportunity for Greece to improve its healthcare system, which we are fully aligned with and can bring well-suited solutions forward for

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Spyridon Gkikas outlines how GE HealthCare's global transformation is playing out in Greece as well as the opportunities and challenges of bringing cutting-edge medical technology into the Greek healthcare system.

GE HealthCare has had a momentous few years with the divestment of its biopharma business and a new "leaner" approach with clearer priorities and KPIs. How have these global shifts filtered down to Greece?

GE HealthCare has gone through a transformation in the last few years with a stronger focus than ever on digitalization. The company is focusing on creating smart devices that make good use of available data while ensuring that we create clinical excellence and operational efficiency.

The move to become an independent company was several years in the making and created a lot of excitement within our teams. Greece itself was emerging from a recession period and looking to become smarter, leaner, and more efficient; meaning that our company transformation dovetailed with the ongoing national transformation. GE HealthCare Greece has grown in recent years while also providing a model for the country to follow.

The COVID pandemic was difficult for all stakeholders, but it also bought a lot of opportunities in terms of openness to digitalization and new solutions. How did GE HealthCare work through this period and what emerged afterwards?

The pandemic was a difficult time for us all. However, being a leader in healthcare gave us the opportunity to contribute towards addressing the significant challenges we faced. The first major challenge was around healthcare infrastructure – especially in primary care – which needed to be improved to provide a proper foundation for people's health as well as economic stability. The second challenge was the use of technology to address the crisis. COVID was an accelerator for the solutions of the future, which we at GE HealthCare are well-placed to provide. There was a sizeable opportunity to bring these solutions into the hands of healthcare professionals and drive change.

Greece has emerged from a decade-long financial crisis, but the country's healthcare budget has remained stagnant. To what extent is the funding available to absorb these new solutions, many of which are technologically advanced and have a correspondingly high price tag?

Greece spends less than other European countries on healthcare as a percentage of GDP; a metric where there is room for improvement. Until this improvement occurs, we must be smarter in the way we develop and deploy our technology and innovations in the country. Although budgets are limited, there are ways in which we can still be effective.

There are two main ways to bring technology into healthcare. The public sector utilises a typical tendering process which could be improved via a more holistic approach to value, considering concepts like disease management and clinical care pathways. In areas like oncology – which is a priority for Europe and a challenge to humanity – there is a need for technology maps that address oncology from diagnosis to treatment and beyond, rather than a fragmented investment that only aims to cover basic needs.

In the private sector, there is also a need for high-end technology. Private sector actors, therefore, need the proper motivation to invest and – like their public sector counterparts – see this investment not as a cost but an opportunity to keep people healthy and grow the economy.

The Greek private sector has already launched some value-based procurement initiatives; is there the potential for this to be rolled out in the public sector as well?

The public sector is still wedded to the traditional tendering model and the value-based approach is still in its infancy there. There is the potential for the public sector to become smarter, more transparent, and to better consider the end recipient of healthcare – the patient. However, we are engaged in several discussions about public-private sector collaborations, which are maturing, and might still help create mutually beneficial new models.

COVID showed that healthcare challenges need to be tackled by a united front of actors from both the public and private sectors, and we expect that this continuing collaboration will bring more value into the system over the next few years.

How would you characterise the impact of Greece's move to establish a centralised procurement authority for medical devices?

Centralised procurement brings the benefit of a broader picture and the ability to build solutions that apply around the disease or across wider geographies. However, the most important thing – whether in a centralised or decentralised system – is that there is a plan and a purpose. The purpose should be to create access to healthcare for all and that diseases should be addressed in a smart, seamless, and efficient way. With this in place, the form of procurement system that exists is simply a means to the end.

Given Greece's lack of digitalised patient records, to what extent are GE HealthCare's most advanced solutions truly suitable in a Greek context?

GE HealthCare is organised in a "glocal" way, meaning that we have both a global perspective but also understand local markets. For this reason, our solutions are flexible and adjustable to the needs that exist in local contexts. Our long history in Greece has allowed us to pinpoint the exact local needs and develop customised platform-based tools to address them. The most important thing is the mindset and openness to change that exists in the country. The tools are here, and we are ready to deploy them if the stakeholder mindset and available budgets are in place to absorb them.

How interoperable are GE Healthcare's solutions with those of the company's competitors in the medtech space?

We are a member of an ecosystem and therefore develop vendor-neutral tools and products that can be integrated within this ecosystem and adjusted to fit existing infrastructure. This ties into our commitment to sustainability in the broadest sense – across interoperability, connectivity, and best utilisation – not just energy consumption.

Greece is GE HealthCare's Eastern European hub and hosts functions for 20 different countries. Why did the company choose to locate this hub in Greece and how does it influence your operations?

GE HealthCare has been present in Greece for more than 30 years, during which time the Greek healthcare system has matured and become very resilient. The country has been part of the European Union for many years and has a great pool of talent and expertise. Indeed, when I joined GE HealthCare Greece back in 2011, there were only 70 employees in the affiliate, but we now boast 145. While there are still issues that need to be addressed, Greece holds a lot of knowledge and experience that other countries in Eastern Europe can learn from.

What makes you so optimistic about how things are going to progress in Greek healthcare in the next few years, and what are going to be the main roadblocks ahead?

Firstly, the need is here. The pandemic showed that healthcare is a vital and foundational infrastructure, and GE HealthCare is at the forefront of the healthcare industry. GE HealthCare is a new organisation post-spinoff, but also one that draws on a 120-year legacy, giving us a great balance of tradition, agility, and speed. Moreover, EU Recovery and Resilience Funding (RRF) is coming online, creating an opportunity for Greece to improve its healthcare system, which we are fully aligned with and can bring well-suited solutions forward for.

The main challenge will always be the resistance to trying to innovate the future of healthcare. This resistance can come from bureaucracy, old mindsets, or poor practices of the past, and will not be easy to change, but we must push for this to create a world where care has no limits. This is our purpose and continues to motivate us daily, foregrounding the patient in everything that we do.

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