

Every two seconds, someone has a stroke somewhere in the world. Most of these incidents are entirely unexpected. In Germany alone there are 270,000 strokes each year. The German Stroke Foundation (Stiftung Deutsche Schlaganfall-Hilfe) develops innovative and comprehensive strategies ranging from stroke prevention, emergency and acute care to rehabilitation and post-treatment programs. Liz Mohn, the foundation's founder and president, and Dr. Brigitte Mohn, its executive director, explain why strokes pose one of the greatest challenges to our health care system. They also provide insight into how their foundation is being transformed into a social welfare enterprise.

Ms. Mohn, you founded the German Stroke Foundation in 1993. Why is this cause so close to your heart?

Liz Mohn: Twenty years ago, people knew very little about strokes, which—although very common—were receiving comparatively little attention from the medical profession. On speaking with experts, I soon realized how much there was to do in this area, as well as how much we might be able to achieve. And every time I meet people who have had strokes, I realize once again how very important this work is.

What do you want the work of the foundation to accomplish?

Liz Mohn: We want to reduce the number of strokes as much as possible with our information and prevention campaigns. We want people to recognize the symptoms, and to respond properly if they think someone might be having a stroke. The first thing to do is to call 911. Every stroke is an emergency! It's crucial to act quickly. We also seek to ensure the best possible treatment for stroke patients, whether that means emergency services, rehabilitation programs, or follow-up care at home. Unfortunately, it's still the case that the results of a stroke cause many people to withdraw from their friends and acquaintances. Often their partners who care for them become isolated, too. A stroke rarely affects just a single individual; it affects the entire family. That's all the more evident when you look at children who have had strokes. We run programs like the "Family Camp," where parents and family members of kids who have suffered →



GERMAN STROKE
FOUNDATION

A SOCIAL WELFARE ENTERPRISE WITH INNOVATIVE IDEAS

Interview with Liz Mohn and Dr. Brigitte Mohn

CHRISTOPH MATTES

The founder and president of the foundation, Liz Mohn (left), and its executive director Dr. Brigitte Mohn



a stroke learn how to use their resources efficiently and to look after themselves as well.

It is often thought that strokes only happen to older people.

But young people and children can have them, too ...

Liz Mohn: I was shocked to learn that kids can have strokes. All of a sudden you have to rethink all of your dreams and plans. But the good news is that children have the highest recovery potential. When young adults have a stroke, other questions arise. They've just started a job, set up a home with a partner, perhaps have children. Here it's a matter of their family's livelihood, and also of how their professional lives will develop. Our foundation provides guidance and counseling for people who have had a stroke and for their family members as well.

Many foundations are suffering right now, both from low interest on their capital as well as from the drop in donations since the recession got underway. How do these two developments impact your work?

Brigitte Mohn: We expect both of these trends to continue for the next several years. Foundations often depend on a stable yield on their capital in order to cover costs and project investments. If they can no longer maintain these yields, they have to diversify into new types of investment to increase their capital or at least hold on to it in real terms. As for the fewer donations right now, that doesn't mean people are less willing to support important organizations or causes. But we have to approach them differently, and show them how much we achieve. That means increasing our internal efficiency while at the same time showing the outside world even more clearly how effective we are. Of course, we also have to think about potential new sources of funding.

You've already started to set off on new paths. What do these consist of?

Brigitte Mohn: We're starting by expanding our partner management. One example would be the prevention campaigns we run with companies. These partnerships are ultimately to everyone's benefit—especially people who have had strokes. We of course make sure that we retain our independence in these campaigns. We are also placing a greater focus on developing products and services that improve stroke prevention or treatment in Germany, or that improve patients' quality of life. We're not out to make money with the proceeds, but instead to refinance our non-profit work. The key term here is "social welfare entrepreneur."

Changing from a donation-based foundation to a social welfare enterprise has surely not been easy, including for your staff members and your organizational culture.

Brigitte Mohn: Overall, a transformation of this type requires a greater degree of strategic thinking. And of course the momentum has to come from the executive board members. If they don't set a clear tone, then you won't find that type of spirit in the teams, either. Donation-based foundations, in particular, often function thanks to employees who bring a lot of idealism and intrinsic motivation to their task. They will do just about anything for their cause, and I have great respect for the enormous commitment that people show when they're in it with their hearts and minds.

Given that we're taking a more market-oriented approach, it's especially important to show the employees that it's not about profit. What we take in, we reinvest for the purpose of enhancing people's lives. The difference lies in the way that we generate our funding. Porsche Consulting has provided outstanding support, especially when it comes to introducing and using new market-oriented attitudes and professional tools. And in close cooperation with our employees it has been instrumental in developing a successful and sustainable approach for our foundation.

How do you think that foundations can become more professional and increase their overall efficiency?

Brigitte Mohn: Often there's not enough attention paid to the principle of refinancing. That means we no longer follow every idea that has good intentions, but instead first ask what the refinancing might look like. If we don't have a satisfactory answer for that, the idea is put on hold. To help in making these decisions, we've introduced instruments that all employees must use. Ideas have to go through what's called a product development process, which we've adopted with support from Porsche Consulting. Some of our employees thought it was a nuisance at first, but now they're really behind it. All in all, this type of instrument simplifies processes, prevents superfluous work, and spares us a good deal of disappointment. ←

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Founded in 1993 by Liz Mohn, the German Stroke Foundation (Stiftung Deutsche Schlaganfall-Hilfe) seeks to prevent strokes and to improve treatment for stroke patients. As is also true of German health care in general, the foundation has to maintain a balancing act between improved quality of treatment on the one hand and cost efficiency on the other. Porsche Consulting has been supporting the foundation in its efforts to become a social welfare enterprise. Professional processes are helping to ensure that donations made to the foundation generate the greatest possible benefits for patients. For example, a standardized product development process was initiated that puts every idea to an internal test: Whom does this program serve? How long will development take and what will it cost? In addition, internal planning and decision-making processes have been restructured, and innovative merchandising and fundraising strategies have been developed.



« IT'S CRUCIAL
TO ACT QUICKLY. »

**Liz Mohn, founder and president
of the German Stroke Foundation**

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SOCIAL WELFARE
ENTREPRENEUR. »

**Dr. Brigitte Mohn, executive director
of the German Stroke Foundation**

