

Tributes on the resignation of Dr Robert Bider as CEO of the Hirslanden private hospital group

1. Dr. Edwin de la H. Hertzog, chairman of the Hirslanden board and the parent company, Medi-Clinic Corporation

When I first met Robert Bider twenty years ago, Hirslanden stood for one single clinic with 105 beds and a turnover of 20m Swiss Franks. Thanks to Robert Bider's competence and strong leadership, Hirslanden has since grown to become Switzerland's largest private hospital group: today Hirslanden comprises 13 of the most modern clinics with over 1,300 beds, and has a turnover of over 1 billion Swiss Franks.

Over all these years Robert and I have kept in regular contact. This gave me the chance to gain a deep insight into the successful development of the private hospital group. By acquiring and successfully integrating other clinics, that one single private clinic developed into a continually expanding hospital group.

This growth was based on solid hard graft in management, technology, and leadership, as well as image building. Robert Bider gave the private hospital group a strong identity of its own: Hirslanden stands for medical care of the highest standard, top quality nursing services, innovation and trust. Today the group has a charismatic image and a profile that shines far beyond the national boundaries.

My long-standing exchanges with Robert and the in-depth knowledge that I gained about Hirslanden with its leading role in the Swiss healthcare sector, formed an essential deciding factor for the take-over of Hirslanden by the South African Medi-Clinic in autumn 2007. The integration is proceeding as planned, and will provide the foundation for future international expansion.

Robert Bider is stepping down after 23 years of successful activities in his operative function as CEO. I consider myself fortunate that Robert has agreed to make himself available as a board member to continue to make important contributions to the successful further development of the group. He will continue to lead Hirslanden in the transitional period until his successor assumes his post, thereby ensuring continuity.

Today, on behalf of the entire board and all our employees, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and my appreciation to Robert Bider for his outstanding achievements and dedication.

Edwin de la H. Hertzog

2. by Dr h.c. Heinrich Steinmann, Chairman of the Hirslanden Board until 2002

What started 23 years ago is today the largest private hospital group in Switzerland with a range of medical services of the very highest standard. The private hospital Hirslanden, founded by a group of doctors in 1929, had a turbulent history and was ultimately taken over by the former Swiss bank Schweizerische Bankgesellschaft SBG. The bank planned to dissolve the deadlocked structures and to put the hospital on a sound footing. In Doctor sc. Robert Bider they found the right man to realise this not uncomplicated task.

Robert Bider put his faith in his rich experience in the public hospital sector, used his knowledge as an engineer and a management expert, and renovated the clinic, which was getting on in years, within a very short period of time. Not content with this first success, he searched for other opportunities for testing and applying the concepts he had elucidated. The idea of bringing together first-class doctors in centres of medical excellence was realised for the first time in 1986, with the foundation of the Hirslanden Heart Centre, and has been followed consistently until the present day. Public hospitals have either already adopted this concept or are in the process of doing so.

However, Robert Bider was conscious of the fact that no breakthroughs would be possible with only one single clinic in the Swiss healthcare sector. Therefore, a courageous and farsighted decision in 1990 led to the take-over of four private hospitals operated at the time by American Medical International AMI. It was a great and bold plan to bring the new clinical complexes into line the same way as he had achieved with Hirslanden. Robert Bider mastered the task with his sporting fighting spirit and by taking vigorous action if necessary. He contacted renowned suppliers worldwide, was a highly sought-after speaker at professional seminars, he revived the public healthcare sector with new ideas, fought for the liberalisation of the healthcare market, developed border-spanning projects, and created a considerable network of contacts.

Ultimately he achieved full-coverage supply with today's 13 clinics with a first-class reputation. He always concentrated on providing top-flight medicine at centres of excellence, providing first-class care and nursing for the patients, use of the latest technologies as well as optimised operational processes and structures. As a full-blooded entrepreneur procrastinators, pedants and bureaucrats were abhorrent to him. For him, standing still was a step backwards.

Today Robert Bider belongs to the pioneers of hospital medical care, and can look back with pride at his outstanding achievements. The group's turnover reached the billion mark, and more than 1,500 doctors and 4,500 highly motivated employees care for a quarter of a million patients every year.

He can be certain of the heartfelt gratitude of all those who were permitted to support him in building up the group.

Heinrich Steinmann

3. Beat Meister MD; Anaesthesiology and Intensive Medicine FMH; affiliated doctor at the Hirslanden Clinic Beau-Site Bern

With his clear vision of a health system based on freedom and responsibility Robert Bider has fundamentally put his stamp on the Swiss public healthcare sector over the last 20 years as a representative of private medicine. With the successful establishment and expansion of the Hirslanden group which stands for responsible, top-flight private medicine he has made a major contribution to the resounding international acclaim enjoyed by Swiss public healthcare. Both sides have profited enormously from the healthy competition between private and public service providers. Robert Bider has shown that clear concepts, slim structures, and private-sector organisation are the secrets of success.

However, this path to success was stony. At first his closest colleagues – and particularly the doctors – had to be convinced that the goal can only be reached with ordered structures and relentless striving for the best possible quality. Due to his uncompromising dedication Robert Bider was initially an enemy of many doctors. However, he eventually succeeded in convincing the doctors to follow his trodden path. With his staff of highly qualified employees he pursued expansion into a full-coverage network of leading private hospitals spanning all the Swiss cantons.

The good organisation and the very latest technical infrastructure today make the hospitals popular working places for excellent physicians, and are regarded as the address of choice for patients. The establishment of centres of medical excellence and joint practices with specialists available around the clock made it possible to set up emergency units and guaranteed patients the greatest possible safety, day and night. However, this success would not have been possible without sound business hospital management or without the co-operation with the health insurers.

Both quality and profitability are vital criteria for expanding the leading role. Robert Bider fought untiringly for co-operation based on partnership between patients, doctors, insurers and hospitals. With new models such as h-care and co-operation agreements with leading health insurers this partnership was put into practice, thus providing the foundations for enduring success. The partnership with the doctors and their integration in important decisions have become an essential component of Hirslanden's business culture. With his charisma, coupled with astuteness, persistence and humour, Robert Bider has overshoot his original target of turning the Hirslanden hospitals into the leading private hospital group in Switzerland.

Beat Meister