

## Maugeri Crisis, “The Local Health Authority should not pay the money to the banks”

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“Do you like winning easy? **3,800 scratch-and-win employees**”. That is what a banner placed at the entrance of the **Luca Maugeri Foundation in Tradate** reads; and it does not even sound that mocking. For the 200 employees of the clinic, learning that their November wages would not be paid must have been a big surprise, the same kind of surprise one experiences when winning a lottery, however with a bitter taste.

Maugeri Clinic, which is universally acknowledged as a centre of excellence in the fields of rehabilitation and occupational medicine, **was not able to ensure a future to its employees overnight, not even in the short-term**. According to the top management of the Foundation, the reasons for this situation lie in the **debts towards the suppliers** which have soared in the last three years, in the turnover decrease and in the cost of labour which is too high, hence poorly competitive in the market. Despite this shock, however, the personnel in the clinic are continuing to work at the usual, fast, pace. Demand in the area has not decreased, indeed, in the case of clinical services, it has even increased. “We had to double the turnover of employees to meet the demand for hospitalization, the 140 beds we have, have reached a saturation rate of 98%”, the representatives of the unitary trade union representative body explain.

**Treatment is guaranteed** – the immediate outcome of the financial difficulties which are being experienced by Fondazione Maugeri has been the stoppage of the supply and the failure to pay the wages. In some cases, despite the willingness and the skills of the personnel, ensuring treatment has become harder, since the material is scarce, which is already the case for the laboratory analyses. The department of radiology

lacks contrast media, the ultrasound scanner is broken and it is possible to use it only one hour after it has been activated. In some cases, suppliers have not been paid for 4 years and that is why the ultrasound scanner technician refuses to repair it. Not all is bad, though. "I have a patient who is taking a medicine that costs €800 per-day. So far, I haven't had any problem," a medical doctor points out.

"Prescribe all that must be prescribed and leave a trace of what you've done. If the hospital isn't able to provide the tools needed to work, the personnel aren't the one to blame", suggests Nino Ventola, a member of the public workers section of the Cisl.

**The total amount of debts of Fondazione Maugeri, which has 19 branches throughout Italy, is about € 53 million, whereas turnover has decreased by €24 million.** To solve the situation the board of directors have decided to carry out linear cuts on labour costs which currently are 61% of the turnover. "It is of little importance whether the clinic of Tradate has been "virtuous" in these years and that its balance sheet has always ensured a good amount of profits to the head hospital in Pavia," an employee points out.

Banks, the Local Health Authority and Region of Lombardy local government – The employees of the Maugeri clinic are aware of the fact that for them it is a very hard time. But they also know they can put some pressure on the parties involved, starting from the banks. "BNL has refused to pay the Local Health Authority's invoices in advance, thus leaving the Foundation without the funds needed to pay the wages. Now, the local government of the Region of Lombardy should intervene and push the Local Health Authorities to pay the Foundation directly and within a reasonable term. In addition to that, if it weren't enough, it is possible to appeal to the Court to obtain an order of payment," Giancarlo Ardizzola, a member of the public workers section of the Cgil, explains.

While 20 days are left until Christmas, the wages issue remains and the announcement by the Foundation's Board of Directors to be willing to pay 20% of the **wage for many employees, is to say the least, inadequate.** "The guaranteed minimum wage should be paid. At least for those families who have a single income and for the couples where both the wife and the husband work here," proposes Lucia during the meeting.

The Pavia demonstration, the negotiation on the social networks and the missing industrial plan – On 16 December, leaving from Tradate by bus at 7.00 AM, the employees will attend a demonstration in Pavia. "The top management of the Foundation have kept a foot in both camps. On the one hand they have opened to an arrangement with rights reserved to file documents at a later date and to a repayment plan with the suppliers, while on the other hand they have announced to have scheduled the negotiation talks with the trade unions for the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, but they didn't inform us directly, we learnt that thanks to a post on Facebook. All this is also a side effect of the fall of the old system of the healthcare in Lombardy of which Pierangelo Daccò was the leader," Ardizzola says. The Foundation itself, last July, pointed out that the loss for the year 2013 was partly due to the effects of the plea-bargaining agreed with the Public Prosecutor of Milan in the judicial investigation

concerning the healthcare system in Lombardy.

Apart from these remarks, what strikes the trade union the most in this negotiation is the lack of clarity for what concerns the industrial plan. Cuts in personnel are the only thing which is certain: €18 million to be cut in 2015. The trade union representative however, must always have an across-the-board idea on the matter in order to be able to understand the intentions of the counterparty and, in this case, the idea, no matter how across-the board it may be, always points to the same direction: “Cut to make the bite “tasty” to the prospective buyers, including banks”.

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