



ESAOTE'S FIELD SERVICE ENGINEERS

The eyes above the masks



The eyes above the masks. *Esaote's field service engineers.*

One hundred and three ultrasound machines to be delivered across four different regions, in a genuine race against time. In order to deliver them, we're having to enter the world where this health crisis is being fought every day. We're working with those people with white coats and masks – the people we've become so accustomed to reading about in our newspapers. In Italy alone, **we have 50 people working in the field, going into hospitals** to ensure that our machines are working perfectly – allowing doctors to make vital diagnoses and save lives. **We've asked six of them to observe the situation on the front line and share the ways in which their work has changed.** Some of them have wives and children working in hospitals – after all, kindred spirits are often drawn to each other over their vocation for service. Some of them will have had to find the words to explain the importance of what they do to their family or friends – because without their hands, our machinery falls silent. **Their hands are precious, but so too are their voices, the looks they exchange above their masks, as part of a relationship with healthcare operators** that drives Esaote on to try to understand and innovate even more. **Anyone who makes a machine work provides renewed impetus for the work of all of us** – that is a fact. Everything has changed for us in the last month, but sometimes, something as simply as words can cut through the struggles caused by our new habits and celebrate the importance of a profession which is now proving its worth.

Time

Nowadays, the ultrasound units we deliver to the front line of the emergency are installed on the day of or the day after delivery – and never more than three days afterwards. Just as we've had to adjust our production operation, we're also having to adapt to a permanent change in the pace of deliveries. **“The way we manage our time changes from day to day,”** explains [Alessandro Capparella](#). **“There are days when you have to work like a madman** to deliver and install ultrasound machines in units where the need is greatest right now – so potentially at-risk wards. Then there are days when there is nothing to do and you're at home with the family, taking care not to share cutlery or glasses with your children, to ensure there is as little contact as possible.” [Davide Bonfiglioli](#) says it's about doing what is needed right now: **“I'm experiencing this crisis alongside the doctors.** They are always anxious to receive the equipment I'm delivering and installing.” [Andrea Di Spigno](#), meanwhile, explains how his job has acquired new value: “Time has become precious. There's a **sense of urgency** in setting up appropriate facilities to deal with the current difficulties, **so bureaucracy becomes a means to check things that actually matter – the way things should be.**”



Dr. Gamma near two Mylab X6 Ultrasounds scanners installed for a new COVID ward at San Luigi Hospital in Orbassano (Turin).

Distance

While the vast majority of us work from home, there are some people whose work is changing in different ways, given that it is impossible to carry out from home. “Not everyone can work remotely – certainly not field service engineers,” explains [Valter Panebianco](#). **“We’re still out there in the field, visiting the last places people should be going: hospitals.”** It is this need that is giving greater meaning to the day-to-day work of these engineers, as [Andrea Di Spigno](#) explains: “I’ve told my son that I don’t want to stay safe at home, because **doing my job is the way I can make a small contribution to help get us through this situation**, particularly at the current time.” The new laws are also changing the way we communicate, according to [Alessandro Capparella](#). “At the start, after the release of the guide to the behaviours we needed to avoid, such as handshakes, hugs and kisses, there was this one strange incident when a doctor held out his hand to say goodbye to me, then suddenly withdrew it and said: ‘We can’t do that any more... goodbye.’ I’m used to shaking hands before saying goodbye to a client so I have to admit that it feels strange not doing it, but rules are rules and they need to be respected.” **The sense of distance for our field service engineers is further amplified by their inability to see the entirety of people’s faces – instead, they are limited to simply exchanging glances above their masks.** “We’re not used to concentrating solely on that part of the face,” says [Stefano Righetto](#). “In day-to-day life, or in normal life, I think we register all the facial expressions we see during a day, even subconsciously. **This lack of expressions is something we’ll have to get used to, at least in the world of work.**” Yet even remotely, our relationship with doctors has taken on a new level of intensity in recent weeks. “I feel real warmth from them and they feel the same from me – even at a safe distance of two metres!” explains [Davide Bonfiglioli](#). **“I can feel their gratitude** and they can feel mine, even though the smiles we exchange are covered up by our masks. **“I feel it when I instruct them on how to use the machine and insist that they call me with any doubts they might have. And I feel it when they give me advice for me and my family** and urge us to stay in safety as much as possible. It’s the same story for [Gianluca Tosco](#), who stepped up on 7 March 2020 and has been drawing on his experiences of volunteering for the Green Cross, something that has given him an understanding of how to act during emergencies. “My relationship with the medical staff I see every day has become even more intimate and empathetic and it certainly makes you feel more involved,” he says. “That’s been the most surprising thing. **The virus has made us more distant physically, but it’s definitely brought us together emotionally.** You want to speak to all your friends, near and far, and you’re always hoping that they’re OK.”

Priorities

“Our priorities have changed,” stresses [Alessandro Capparella](#). **“As engineers, our priority is to do the best job we possibly can,** given the situation we find ourselves in, and to ensure we’re as well-protected as possible against the virus so that we don’t spread it and that we don’t bring it home with us – most importantly of all. We want to reassure the people around us that when we come home after a long day’s work, we haven’t come into contact with any potential infected people.” **“A priority right now is having clear, well-defined internal guidelines with clear rules,”** says [Gianluca Tosco](#). “The hope is that everyone is on the same page because that’s the only way we’ll come through this. I’ve become more aware of how much concentration you need to put into your work and I’m also more aware of risk – I take greater care both for myself and for the people around me now.” What is often dismissed as mere bureaucracy is now taking on a different meaning too, as Andrea Di Spigno explains: “Before the pandemic, the DUVRI [risk assessment] was just a document that organisations sent to suppliers because the law forced them to. Often the people that met us at a site wouldn’t even be aware of the content of the document – that doesn’t happen now. **Now the DUVRI and all operational instructions have been updated to reflect current requirements and dangers** and compliance with these has become an absolute essential, without which we couldn’t even start to do our jobs (and rightly so).”

Trust

“I have personal experience in my family,” begins [Gianluca Tosco](#). “My daughter is a healthcare worker on the front line (she’s a radiology technician in a big hospital in Turin). We speak every day, more than we did before, and her experiences reflect my own. Her daily sacrifice makes me realise that I must – and we must – continue. She sounds exhausted at the end of every shift. **All our healthcare workers are giving 110%, which motivates me even more. I focus on giving everything I have for my colleagues at this critical time.** It’s vital that we have trust in our institutions at this time. I have trust in our company and I search for that trust in the glances I exchange with the doctors I meet every day. Having trust means you don’t hesitate as you go about your day-to-day work. On a personal level, the fact that Esaote provides the best possible conditions for me to do my work is a great sign.” [Valter Panebianco](#) shares this

trust in the people working in our hospitals: “Our work does not expose us to the same risks as the doctors and nurses, but we work in the same environments and this virus doesn’t make any distinctions. **We all owe something to the people that take care of the sick with such courage and sacrifice.** Through our work, we gain the satisfaction of providing a little bit of support for their activity.” [Andrea Di Spigno](#) agrees that there is greater trust within the community at large at the moment: “There’s more trust between people who find themselves in a difficult, shared situation. I don’t know if this stems from that fact that we’re all involved in a public service and that there’s no reason to clash with anyone, because we’re all rowing in the same direction, or by the fact that **we need to hurry up because events aren’t waiting for us – they’re on our tails.**”



Rituals

Work is made safe by the provision of legally required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), but this in turn requires us to adopt new rituals during the working day.

[Alessandro Capparella](#) explains how the current situation has triggered new daily rituals for everyone at work: “The process of dressing begins as soon as you arrive:

you get your mask, put your gloves on, grab your spare gloves, put on overalls to protect your clothes... And then there’s the ritual of coming home and removing

and throwing away everything you’ve used at work: your gloves, masks, overalls.

You have to disinfect everything you can’t throw away, like your mobile phone, computer and pens, to make sure that there would be no risk involved if my son were to use my phone or PC. On top of that, when we’re out and about we use sanitising gel and when we’re at home we use whatever we have available.” According to

[Davide Bonfiglioli](#), the regular visits to hospitals inevitably lead to a greater sense of responsibility when he returns home: “That’s why I take my work clothes off in the garage before I go into the house. That’s why I run to the bathroom and take a shower as soon as I get in and why I **hold my hand up to stop my daughter as she runs**

over for a cuddle.” In [Andrea Di Spigno](#)’s eyes, rituals are not just about actions, but words too: “The personal habits I’ve introduced to prevent infection have come to be like a mantra. Before I get out of the car, I call my contact to get exact instructions on where to find them, and almost always they’ll come out to find us to avoid the risk of us ending up in unsafe areas. I get out of the car, sanitise my hands, put on my mask and gloves and disinfect my protective glasses. Only after all that do I think about the equipment I need for my actual job. I approach the entrance of the hospital or diagnostic centre and put on my single-use overalls. I look around for my contact – some of them I already know, but it can be difficult to recognise them with a mask on. **We greet each other by holding out our arms as if to say: ‘This is how we need to get kitted out to avoid the worst.’**

The mantra continues once our work is done.

We say goodbye and hope for better times, then I head to a safe area and remove my overalls, gloves and mask and sanitise my hands before I leave. I go back to the car, choosing the route that keeps me as far away from other people as possible. When I get there, I disinfect my protective glasses and place them in a waterproof bag, before sanitising my hands once again.

When I get home, I think back over my day to check that I've done everything possible to keep the virus outside of the house. I leave virtually everything in the car (you never know).

Once I get into the house, I struggle to keep my children away from me – they want physical contact, especially my youngest. I run to the bathroom to take a shower and change my clothes.”



Team

Another key word. Our field service engineers are working as part of a team with the doctors and the clinical engineers – “people, like me, who are working on the *second line*”, as [Davide Bonfiglioli](#) puts it. [Stefano Righetto](#), meanwhile, explains how the concept of teamwork has taken on a new meaning: “Usually we work on our own, independently. But when there are special jobs to do, like right now when there are lots of ultrasound machines to install after the CONSIP tenders, **you end up working with colleagues**. It’s a pleasure. We know that we’re going through a critical situation and **I think this will live long in the memory... it’s a bit like a big event**, although of course we all have liked to have avoid this situation.”

It’s hard for all of us to make sense of what’s going on – all we can do is try to contribute as much as possible through our work. Anyone who has chosen this profession has always had a love of service and knows that what they do really matters, even if it often remains unseen. “**My hope, and I think this is shared by my colleagues, is that our work is useful to others but most importantly that this pandemic passes as quickly as possible**, because life isn’t easy in these conditions,” says [Alessandro Capparella](#). “Often people ask why I’m doing what I’m doing. But my answer is always the same: someone has to do it. In a way, I’m proud of the work we’re doing.” For many of us, our thoughts are with those that we leave behind, working without respite, when we finish at a hospital. “**Like them, I keep going**,” says [Davide Bonfiglioli](#). “I do my best, aware of the risk I’m running, though it’s definitely less acute than it is for them. I take **strength from the importance of my work** – though it’s certainly less important than theirs.” That awareness is a key part of what we do, according to [Gianluca Tosco](#), who has a different name for the courage shown by the service engineers on a daily basis: “The term that best sums up my view of it is *healthy ignorance*. You can’t be afraid of the situation, but you do need to approach it with caution and professionalism.” [Andrea Di Spigno](#) explains that we can learn a lot from the sense of community and responsibility shown by the people that fire up the machines every day: a simple gesture that connects the work done before and after that point, providing the link between doctors and machinery: “**When we get through this – because we will – I hope that we all learn something from it.**”

Things that seem different aren't always a threat. And things that don't seem different aren't always harmless. We must adhere to the procedures, rules and laws – not just because they're there, but because they exist to ensure that mistakes aren't made without thinking and to prevent us from causing interference with others." [Valter Panebianco](#) is proud of what we're doing as a society: "We're involved in a joint effort, even if that means simply staying at home. We want to give meaning to our kids' colourful messages of hope, which we see fluttering on the balconies. Everything will be fine."

