FRANCO FONTANA L’ad della società degli apparecchi per la diagnostica: «Risponderemo anche a Europa e Usa»

«Esaote, produzione ecografie +70-80%. Stiamo correndo per sostenere l’Italia»

INTERVISTA

Gilda Ferrari / GENOVA

Prima è andata in soccorso della Cina, Paese con il quale ha un legame forte, visto che l’azienda è composta da una cordata di sei gruppi cinesi industriali (Wandong, Yuwell, Kangda) e finanziari (Yunfeng, Shanghai Ftz, Tianyi). Ora si è messa al servizio dell’Italia, Paese di cui è sempre stata una fonte di ispirazione.

Esaote, azienda genovese attiva nella produzione di apparecchiature per la diagnosi medicali, è un 1.106 dipendenti nel mondo di cui 670 in Italia, è tra le aziende autorizzate a produrre per il mercato internazionale. In questa fase, il sistema sanitario nazionale ha bisogno di ecografie per aiutare i medici nella diagnosi e nel trattamento dei pazienti. In questa fase, il sistema sanitario nazionale ha bisogno di ecografie per aiutare i medici nella diagnosi e nel trattamento dei pazienti.

INTERVIEW

BY Gilda Ferrari / GENOA

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Based in Genoa, Esaote produces medical diagnostics equipment and has 1,100 employees across the world, 670 of which are based in Italy. They are one of the companies authorised by the government to continue operating - and they are doing so at full speed. “Production of our range of technology is able to adapt to market fluctuations to ensure continuity of supply and safety during the production process,” explains CEO Franco Fontana. “Though many of our staff are working remotely, the entire organisation is coordinating to adjust to the government measures and the needs of the health service.”

What kind of conditions are you working in?
“It's complicated. We’ve had to go to great lengths to reorganise everything. Our Genova Erzeilli and Florence offices employ over 300 people, 97% of which are now working remotely. As of Monday, our Multedo facility has been split in two over two floors, so that we can ensure social distancing without having to cut shifts. Due to logistical factors, we weren’t able to adopt a similar approach in Florence, so we had to rejig the shifts there.”

What's been the hardest thing to deal with? The spike in demand?
“It’s been a constant effort for us to adapt to market demand. We produce diagnostics equipment, MRI scanners and ultrasound machines. Right now, the Italian health service requires portable ultrasound machines for use in intensive care. We’ve not stopped producing MRI scanners, but we’ve adjusted our workflow and priorities. We’re also trying to draw on our experience of working with China in order to act as a kind of bridge between the two countries, as well as bringing back tools and equipment where this is possible.”

Your Chinese partners have provided masks for employees. What about equipment for hospitals?
“We’re working with one of our shareholders, Yuwell, to support Italy by delivering lung ventilators for use in subintensive care. We’re working with partners whose production operations are fully certified. The first 200 ventilators for the Italian health service will arrive next week.”

Are Esaote's own products in demand from the health service during this period?
“We’re directly involved in the intensive care effort through our portable ultrasound machines, which play a vital role in monitoring a patient’s progress because they can be brought to each bed. We produce a wide range of ultrasound machines of varying levels of sophistication, and right now we're focusing on the portable versions.”

How much has production increased?
“The production of portable ultrasound scanners has increased by 70-80%, but in more general terms we’ve made huge efforts in distribution to redirect non-urgent products destined for other countries to Italy.”

How long has that process been going on for?
“A month. Initially we supported China and now we're seeing the same kind of needs in other European countries and the United States as a result of the global pandemic.”

Are you reassessing your production plans?
“We’re still producing MRI scanners, but we’re currently giving priority to the urgent needs of the Italian national health service.”

Esaote recorded revenue of €217 million in 2018, which was lower than in previous years. What can we expect for 2019?
“The financial year ends in April, but our numbers are showing growth. We’re doing well in Europe and particularly in the USA, which is a very challenging market.”