

FORUM

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Small clinic with great success

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The view from the office window shows the Düsseldorf skyline from its most spectacular side. The Clinic Bel Etage is located in an elegant modern building opposite the former state parliament building of North Rhine-Westphalia at the Kaiserteich. The private clinic is an internationally renowned centre for motion-preserving spinal surgery with the fields of neurosurgery, orthopaedics as well as plastic and aesthetic surgery. We are talking to Chief Physician Andreas Schmitz, who founded the Clinic Bel Etage 2015 together with his wife Anja Schmitz.

The Düsseldorf private clinic Bel Etage focuses on top treatment and holistic well-being

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How does one get the idea of founding a private hospital? "My wife is an alternative non-medical practitioner and I am a doctor," says neurosurgeon Schmitz. That's why we weren't allowed to set up a practice together in Germany - but we could set up a clinic. There was already a private clinic in the building complex, and actually the couple only wanted to open a small clinic with three or four beds on one of the upper floors. But the colleague downstairs dropped out, and so Anja and Andreas Schmitz took over all the rooms.

"A doctor-led clinic without a large corporation behind it, but with alternative medicine - many management consultants would probably advise against this," says Andreas Schmitz. "But we have dared to do so because we want to show that it is possible to offer very good medicine in this way. At present the clinic has 26 beds, an expansion by 14 beds is planned. Vascular surgery, cardiosurgery and cardiology are to be added as new specialties. Five in-house and 30 to 40 visiting doctors work at Bel Etage.

Special field: disc prosthetics

"My specialty is disc prosthetics," explains Andreas Schmitz. "Many hospitals do not use these prosthetics because they are 2,000 € more expensive than a stiffening of the spine. However, we want patients to get the best implants". This also benefited the members of more and more statutory health insurance companies, which would cover the procedure in individual cases.

"We use particularly innovative implants from France," says Andreas Schmitz and shows a model. The artificial intervertebral disc consists of two titanium plates with a layer of polyurethane in the middle. "The surface of the titanium plates is shaped like a coral. After the operation, the bone grows into this structure within three months. The polyurethane becomes soft at 37°C body temperature, allowing the prosthesis to move."

The chief physician is convinced of the advantages of the procedure: "The patients are fit again more quickly and their satisfaction is much greater. There is a considerable difference between stiffening two or three levels of my spine and being able to move my head again. The prosthetics also perform better in long-term observation, because the adjacent intervertebral discs are relieved of load and not put under strain". Since he became acquainted with disc prosthetics at a congress in 2002, Andreas Schmitz has become a leading expert in this field with thousands of successful operations.



The neurosurgeon is a renowned specialist in the field of disc prosthetics.

Patients from many countries

The good reputation of the Clinic Bel Etage has long been known internationally. There are patients from the USA, Canada, Australia and Arab countries who have heard about the clinic in online forums. Arab countries send people through their embassies who cannot receive optimal treatment in their own country: "That's part of the public health system there, normal citizens come here," explains the clinic director. Four to five foreign patients per week are operated on in the clinic.

Not only the treatment but also the food contributes to the charisma of Bel Etage. On the ground floor, the clinic runs its own restaurant, which is open to passers-by as well as providing meals for the patients. The food is free of glucose, lactose and gluten, but at the same time it is occasionally downright savory: on the day of our visit we have Leberkäs meat loaf with red cabbage and Spätzle noodles and it tastes delicious. Anja and Andreas Schmitz encourage patients to try the healthy food instead of having pasta and pizza delivered.

Stiegmeyer beds as a success factor

You really feel at home in the modern and cosily furnished rooms of the clinic. The Stiegmeyer beds of the Seta type contribute to this. "During the furnishing of the clinic, I spent a lot of time looking at beds," says Andreas Schmitz. "Of course we wanted to stand out in terms of design, but there are a lot of technical regulations to be observed in a hospital. There are beautiful wooden care beds, but we are not allowed to use them here. At Stiegmeyer we found hospital beds that convinced us both visually and functionally. And we have found that the beds can look a little bit like hospital and high-tech, so that the patients feel well looked after and professionally treated.

After four years of service, the chief physician is still very satisfied with the beds: "We had no problems at all during all this time," he says. The Seta beds are one of the factors contributing to the success of the Clinic

Bel Etage: "After all, the patient spends most of the day in bed. Many patients feel so well that they think they are in a hotel."