

VIKAND steps up to the plate

Across the USA, there are literally hundreds of equipment and service suppliers looking after the cruise fleets in various ports.

CSI spoke with Peter Hult, Co-founder and CEO of Florida-based health care provider VIKAND.

VIKAND provides global medical and public health service solutions to the entire maritime industry, including cruise, yacht, superyacht, commercial shipping, fishing, and energy sectors.

The company currently works with more than 200 cruise ship clients - spread over 32 cruise lines - supporting 120,000 crew members with medical and mental wellness needs supported by experienced on board and onshore medical teams.

Hult said that VIKAND can support the cruise industry in three main ways:

First, as an outsourced medical management services provider.

Here, under a medical management contract, the company manages all of the cruise line's healthcare needs, including contracting with the medical staff and retaining the medical malpractice liability.

Why would any cruise line like to retain this liability? This starts with the sourcing and examining the credentials of medical staff. Ongoing training and support is provided 24/7 for medical staff on board to ensure that there are two way communications so they can provide daily updates on not only acute but also ongoing daily medical cases where VIKAND can help with advice as necessary.

The company also manages all the compliance issues, such as standard operating protocols, procedures and policies including COVID-19 protocols.

Outbreak prevention management is provided and protocols, which are the pro-active aspect to help reduce healthcare risk on board, as well as making sure that the on board medical facilities meet all of the compliances, both from an overall standpoint with flag states and the IMO and from a port state perspective.

During the past two years, VIKAND has been heavily involved with COVID-19 to ensure that all policies,



VIKAND Co-founder and CEO, Peter Hult

procedures and protocols have been augmented, upgraded, updated, as the pandemic changed in severity and various regulators updated their local jurisdictions. The company has worked with many cruise line operators and associations in this process.

VIKAND ensures that all the biomedical equipment on board is maintained and managed properly, including annual calibration checks and certification. Repair and replacement services for the medical equipment on board and new equipment procurement are also provided.

The on board pharmaceutical and controlled substances supplies are closely managed, including reducing waste, due to expiration by managing the stock intensively by timing deliveries to ensure optimum levels are maintained.

In addition, case management and claims management are provided from a regulatory standpoint but also if a crew member or guest is disembarked on medical grounds, VIKAND can continue to provide the overall management from a medical, as well as a claims/regulatory standpoint.

Public health support is also provided with regards to ship auditing, training, education, protocols, procedures and tools to reduce healthcare risks on board and meet public health standards.

Second, as a medical consultant.

Clients are advised about on board medical management as above although the cruise line retain

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the responsibility for employing their own medical staff and also retain the responsibility for medical malpractice liability for example.

Third, provide specific services related to the a cruise ship's operations.

Most of the specific services mentioned above can be provided separately from the company's total health-care medical management service on an 'as needed' basis, or under an annual contract, depending on the client's requirements.

'A La Carte' solution

Hult explained that the top four cruise lines tended to adopt an 'a la carte' solution, by which VIKAND provides support with specific services.

Most of the other cruise lines have signed the company up either as a medical manager or medical consultant. VIKAND deals with 32 of the 40 cruise lines in this sector.

The average cruise ship operator will opt for a medical management/medical consultant contract on the medical services side. On the medical support side it is bio-medical equipment maintenance and calibration, public health and medical escort services.

VIKAND has already organised local representation in Monaco and will be opening a fully serviced office in Copenhagen in early April located in the Danish Ship-owners' Association's building.

Covering 32 brands, the ships will call at a variety of places, some with less health care availability than others. Hult claimed that VIKAND supplies best in class support in areas of extreme weather and complies with all regulatory requirements in those areas.

A lot of our clients (around 20%) are expeditionary by nature so the company has "a lot of experience in providing medical support in this sector," he said.

He also confirmed that the company works very closely with organisations, such as CLIA on the various medical and public health work groups.

Speaking about the Seafarer Human Sustaina-

bility Charter work, Hult said "In order to have a commercially sustainable shipping community, we need to have a sustainable seafaring community and we all recognise that it is a dynamically changing environment as younger seafarers join and we try to create a more diverse seafaring community.

"Our job at VIKAND is trying to drive the awareness around creating a sustainable seafaring community by promoting:

- Seafarers' access to communications.
- Seafarers' access to global electronic financial systems.
- Seafarers' access to good and nutritious food.
- Seafarers' physical wellbeing.
- Seafarers' mental wellness .
- Seafarers' easy access to modern health care.
- Seafarers' access to a safe and healthy on board work environment.
- Being part of a positive work environment; free of abuse, harassment, sexual harassment and assault with pro-active and attainable support, engagement and training.
- Seafarers' safety net when at home and ashore.
- Providing seafarers' families with a safety net offering seafarers peace of mind.
- We encourage an environment focusing on seafarers' education including human relations, emotional intelligence, leadership, and an inclusive culture that addresses diversity, inclusion, and equity.

"VIKAND wants to help promote the fact that the industry needs to work together in totality around seafarer sustainability. By having small incremental improvements in each of the above categories, the total impact will be profound.

"VIKAND wants to help be a catalyst of change under the umbrella of a commercially sustainable environment to ensure we continue to have a commercially viable industry," he concluded.