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Interview with Sophie Boissard

By Daniel Rosenweg

INTERVIEW - At the head of the Korian Group, leader in France and Europe in elderly care, Sophie Boissard highlights all the measures taken and considers the accusations against her group to be "unspeakable".

THE PARISIEN. What is the death toll in the Korian Group's nursing homes?

Sophie BOISSARD - I will be transparent. By the way, Korian is the only group to publish its figures. To date, out of 23,000 residents, we deeply regret 606 deaths related to Covid-19, mainly in the Ile-de-France region and in the Grand-Est region. About fifteen establishments have suffered more than ten deaths. Two-thirds of our 308 nursing homes have been spared. I would like to express to the families our sadness and compassion in the face of the shock caused by the sudden and violent arrival of this unprecedented epidemic.



Our group has been the object of unspeakable attacks that have shocked the whole company. I will not allow our company or our employees, who are true heroes, to be denigrated.

Some establishments have suffered a massacre: 37 deaths in Mougins (Alpes Maritimes), 28 in Pollionnay (Rhône), 26 in Thise (Doubs), 25 in Noisy-le-Grand (Seine-Saint-Denis), 24 in Bures-sur-Yvette (Essonne) ... How is this possible?

It's an epidemic that has surprised everyone and about which little is still known. Our first case of Covid was detected in Mougins on March 15th. At that time, we only knew of two clusters in France: in the Oise and the Haut Rhin. We don't know how the virus entered Mougins. There was no epidemic investigation. It must have been there for several days already because tests revealed that about 15/30 residents and staff members were also contaminated, including the head of the establishment and the doctor. We immediately organised a sealed containment on the first floor, but a week later we were confronted with a second wave that affected a dozen people. Within 24 hours, the situation at the establishment turned into a nightmare. We sent thirty people as reinforcements – everyone was mobilized.

Some people talk about the lack of masks, the lack of respect for barrier gestures...

The authorities triggered the Blue Plan on 6 March. At Korian we started working on 25 February, confining residents and limiting visits. We generalised the wearing of masks in all our establishments on 21 March, whether there was a case or not. The authorities then imposed it on 6 April. We have 30 days of stock, so we were able to distribute 100 masks per day and per establishment. I can't let it be said that we didn't provide the means. In fact, no one in the group exercised their right to withdraw. And you know, the group has recruited 3,000 people since March 1 to deal with this pandemic.

Nearly a dozen families have filed a complaint for endangerment of others, lack of information... Grasse's sub-prefect questioned your reactivity in Mougins. What do you tell them?

I will not comment on what the sub-prefect said. I also have no comment on the complaints. Justice will decide. As I said, all means have been used everywhere. I also want to say that, in Mougins, for example, we alerted the designated contact for each family in time, as planned. But it is true, with hindsight, we should have perhaps organised general communication.

Would you say that the management of the crisis by the authorities did not make your task any easier?

From 1 March to 24 April, 500,000 screening tests were carried out in France. This is the volume carried out every week in Germany where, since the beginning, screening and isolation at the slightest sign has been carried out. We have 250 nursing homes in Germany ; less than 20 establishments have been affected by the virus, with very few victims. In France, until recently, only the hospital was able to detect the virus. I call for the whole environment of the elderly to be tested and retested. Finally, in France there are no certified serological tests, which are more effective, whereas there are some in Germany, Belgium...

What are you doing today to prevent contamination?

On 13 April we launched a generalised screening plan: all staff and residents of half of our nursing homes have already been tested. The other half will be tested by 6 May. And we will re-test everyone at the first sign to isolate any new cases. It's the only way to be effective in the absence of a cure.

Does it seem normal to you that the managing director of a company in the social field, co-financed by health insurance, departmental councils, etc., should be paid one million Euros gross per year and receive 62,000 free shares in 2017?

I have decided to reduce my salary and bonuses for 2020 by 25% to feed a new fund of one million Euros which will finance therapeutic research dedicated to the elderly and solidarity actions towards women. The Chairman and the 23 directors and members of the Management Committee will also contribute to this fund.

Will you provide a bonus for staff?

Yes. I would like a bonus to be paid by the end of the second quarter to all the staff of our 308 nursing homes and 83 clinics involved in the crisis. To the order of €1,000, it will be a Macron-type bonus, therefore tax-free and without social security charges.