

Making Every Moment Meaningful

The healthcare industry is in radical transition. Rising costs and unacceptably poor outcomes are causing healthcare leaders to shift from an illness-based system to a wellness-driven model. New technologies, new processes and higher expectations of both patients and practitioners is challenging healthcare norms to adapt and improve. The need for radical innovation has never been more critical.

A study of the journey of patients, conducted by a team of Steelcase Health researchers, uncovered a significant opportunity for improving the healthcare experience. They observed how much time people spent waiting: waiting for direction, waiting for consultation, waiting for results. They saw people waiting and wasting the currency of our era: time.

The researchers saw this waiting happen repeatedly in spaces that offered little more than rows of armchairs squeezed into tight and dehumanizing formations.

They saw patients and their families awaiting critical information, anxious because they were in locations that were out of the sight line of the caregiver.

They saw people unable to perform focused activities or access medical information, and little or no emphasis on privacy, making technology accessible or providing comfort. And they saw no opportunity for people to connect with family members and caregivers in a private and respectful manner.

More often than not, patients and loved ones were placed in a holding pattern while they waited. In essence, time stood still. No thought or insight was given to how people might potentially spend their valuable time. The result was, and continues to be, a frustrating experience for the patient, and a lost opportunity for the provider.

“The fault lies in the fact that these transitional spaces, commonly called waiting areas, are geared towards a bygone era,” explains Rob Heitmeier, general manager, Steelcase Health. “Smart phones, tablets and other emerging platforms allow people to do more things, from more places than ever before, and this has shifted user behavior significantly. Our expectation is that we can be productive and engaged from anywhere.”

Because of these rapidly evolving technologies, our daily experiences are no longer tethered by time and space. Yet countless healthcare organizations seem unaware of how space, technology and information can converge to create new user opportunities. They are unaware of how the very space they occupy can enable people to get the most out of every minute they spend there. They are unaware that their space can make every moment meaningful.

There are transitional moments between key touch points in a patient’s journey. Steelcase research identified opportunities where space could create a better experience through a more meaningful use of time.

SO HOW DO YOU MAKE EVERY MOMENT COUNT?

The key lies in understanding user behavior—the patterns of behavior from which insight-inspired design can emerge. The patterns the Steelcase Health team uncovered led them to think about the transitional spaces in a healthcare facility in a new and more thoughtful way.

The team observed that whether it’s for five minutes or five hours, people of all sizes and physical conditions naturally seek comfort. It was also clear that people want choice and control over where and how they spend their time.

From a spatial perspective, this can be solved by providing multiple settings within a given space: offering areas for consulting with a physician, areas for watching instructional videos, areas for perching while awaiting key information, and areas for relaxing or even sleeping.

ONE PATIENT’S JOURNEY

They observed very practical concerns, such as the need for a place for personal belongings in clear view and within easy reach. As well, everyone was looking for ways to connect—to other people and to technology. Another important observation—spaces were not flexible enough to accommodate family gatherings.

It was also clear that privacy was a major concern for people—spaces that provided enough privacy to share information comfortably and stress-free, but not so that individuals felt isolated.

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), “Patients and their families are essential partners in the effort to improve the quality and safety of care. Their participation as active members of their own healthcare team is an essential component of making care safer and reducing admissions.”

To create more meaningful use of time, healthcare spaces should support the need for privacy, comfort and emotional wellbeing.

“We’re finding that connections with other people, information and technology also plays a role,” says Heitmeier. “And the process of getting better is no longer solely confined to clinical spaces.”

It was with all of these dynamics in mind—comfort, posture, sightlines, privacy and connection with both technology and people—that the Steelcase Health research team embraced the challenge of how to design for spaces that make the transitional moments of patients ones that engage them and do not waste their time.

These insights served as building blocks for Regard™, a solution that gives people greater control over their transitional experiences. Spaces equipped with Regard provide patients, loved ones and practitioners with the ability to engage privately and comfortably and it allows for easier check-ins. Integrated education based media settings promote self-learning.

“It’s exciting to think about common spaces in ways that go beyond aesthetics,” says Alan Rheault, director of industrial design for Steelcase Health. Ultimately we’re looking to solve for a broad array of experiences that have the potential to happen within these areas.”

With Regard, the transitions people experience can be restorative, calming or productive. Gone are the rows of armchairs that discourage privacy and communication. In their place are areas that allow people to connect, relax and absorb information. For those wanting to connect electronically, outlets are situated beside both seats and surfaces, and essential in all of these scenarios is the idea of choice—that the user dictates the experience rather than the space.

While research and insights behind it resulted from a deep understanding of healthcare environments and conditions, the solutions Regard offers are equally applicable to education and corporate environments. Any organization eager to reclaim dormant real estate such as hallways, libraries and third spaces into connective hubs where groups can gather and collaborate can apply Regard to turn these transitional spaces into meaningful places.

“For us, it goes back to giving people the respect they deserve, whether it be in healthcare, education or business,” says Rheault. “There will always be those moments of transition and we recognized the need to find ways to make those moments more fulfilling.”

It’s time to make every moment count.

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